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# **Police-community discussion: Acknowledging basic conditions, facts first is vital**

**Statement from Alderman Ashanti Hamilton  
December 5, 2014**

Mayor Barrett traveled to the White House earlier this week to meet with other U.S. municipal leaders and President Obama about beginning local conversations on police-community relations.

I am proposing that the first conversation we have start with the acknowledgement that disenfranchised communities – because of poverty, minority status, and other related issues – have traditionally had a fundamentally different relationship with law enforcement and the criminal justice system than middle America. It is also important, as a starting point, to acknowledge that inherent in that different relationship has been the acceptance of a two-tier definition of justice that has led to wide disparities in our justice system.

In fact, there have been many reports and studies, both national and local, to support this position. In recent memory, the City of Milwaukee commissioned the Police Assessment Resource Center (PARC) to evaluate and make recommendations for improving Milwaukee's Fire and Police Commission. Few, if any, of those recommendations have been instituted and many of the problems identified in the report persist. Any dialogue should begin with steps that will be done differently to ensure the constitutional protections of our citizens; it must not be a justification of why the problems occur or a denial that injustices occur at the rate they do.

While it is good that the Mayor is accepting the President's challenge to take part in the national discussion on police-community relations and the socio-economic and racial implications that are naturally a part of it, I'm not going to pretend that this conversation is just starting. And if the handling of that discussion is not done properly it may be the spark – like the mishandling of the many high profile police killings being evaluated across the country (including those here in our own city) – to ignite more unrest when what is needed is healing in our communities.

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