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Alderman, 2nd District

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MPD actions further damage public faith

Statement of Alderman Joe Davis, Sr. September 15, 2014

As I reviewed the video that the Journal Sentinel released of the booking room incident at the forefront of the City of Milwaukee's illegal strip search cases, I found those unequivocal images incredibly disheartening. While law enforcement officers take an oath to protect and serve, it seems there are some on the Milwaukee Police Department who are willing to sully the reputation of the whole department in order to protect their own interests.

The African American community has raised this issue before, only to be marginalized by those who would use the city's high crime rate to justify the actions in this video. That this officer could tiptoe around the truth and yet avoid discipline for her actions (although the video was reviewed by the appropriate command staff) reveals how truly unsettled Milwaukee is becoming.

I was at the most recent Fire and Police Commission hearing in City Hall, and I witnessed the Police Chief lecture a commissioner about the community's perception of the department. He dismissed her concerns regarding the impact of traffic stops in the poorest parts of the city as those of only a few fragmented community groups.

During the same meeting, I witnessed protests regarding in-custody deaths—specifically the shooting of Dontre Hamilton—that clearly showed otherwise.

This is not a good situation for the city. There are numerous claims regarding illegal strip searches by MPD officers, and this video has diminished the trust that has been gained in certain neighborhoods.

As the Common Council member who brought the Black Male Achievement initiative to the city, this video drove home for me the concerns of African American males here in Milwaukee. We portray these men and boys in such a derogatory fashion that we sometimes forget that they were someone's child at one time or another.

The poverty rate and unemployment among this population is dismal, but we sure can put on a façade that everything in the City of Milwaukee is looking hunky-dory. I saw something else in the eyes of the young African American male in the video. I saw shame, humiliation and, most strikingly, hopelessness as that officer violated standard operating procedures, his code of conduct and that young man's civil rights, in my opinion.

We have good people and bad people on the MPD and in our community. But if we are going to get this right, we must acknowledge our personal biases and keep them from getting in the way of seeking truth and justice. The entire City of Milwaukee is depending on us.