
Common Council President



2nd District Alderman

Cavalier Johnson

City of Milwaukee Common Council

In Milwaukee we need reforms and better communication, accountability

Statement of Common Council President Cavalier Johnson June 1, 2020

The throat under that knee could have been mine. It could have been yours.

His name was George Floyd. He had two daughters. With some of his final breaths, he called out for his recently passed mother.

The people of Minneapolis already had a long list of names: David Smith, Philando Castile, Terrance Franklin, Jamar Clark, and Justine Ruszczyk were either shot or suffocated by their local police.

Every city in the United States of America has such a list.

In Milwaukee we remember, among others: Joel Acevedo, Derek Williams, Sylville Smith, Dontre Hamilton, Frank Jude, and Ernest Lacy. Because of those memories, and based on what we saw in that video from South 38th Street in Minneapolis, many of us took to the streets over the course of the last several days and nights.

I can't say what was in everyone's mind or heart who marched and drove through so many neighborhoods this past weekend, but I know that the organized portions - which lasted until past dark - were peaceful, heartbroken, and righteous.

Those of us who represent this city need to heed their call to action as they utilize their first amendment rights enshrined in the constitution. I encourage our citizens to utilize these rights to speak out against injustices — especially systemic injustices that consistently result in the loss of life for black and brown people.

We need major reforms now that will hold our police more accountable when they harm us instead of protect us. Some of these changes can be done immediately within two City departments: the Fire and Police Commission and the Milwaukee Police Department itself.

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Our discipline process needs to be swift, consistent, and transparent — and needs to send a message to all officers and citizens that not just the offenders will be punished, but also those officers who stand by and do nothing, and especially those officers who file false, misleading, or incomplete reports afterward.

In some cases our hands are tied by state laws, and those laws will also need to change. Everyone in the state of Wisconsin deserves to feel protected, not threatened, by the armed force of the law.

If the cynical mayhem that occurred after the organized protests and well past midnight taught us anything, it's that we all need the police — and their job is a dangerous one. More than 20 stores were looted and one of our police officers was shot. The burning and looting of a neighborhood pharmacy only creates an undue hardship for seniors who rely on it for prescription drugs. Destroying a grocery store only leads to less access to foods that our community needs for the nourishment of our bodies. Setting fires only turns the narrative from the reason for protests to the ashes left in their wake. Such violence is unacceptable no matter what inspired it. Fortunately our wounded officer is expected to make a full recovery.

As we strive for a better, safer, and more just city, we must find common cause. Hopefully these reforms are something everyone in this city and state can get behind: because transparent, ethical policing will make all of us all safer, no matter what color our uniform or our skin.

None of us want to see protests turn violent, and none of us want to have so much to protest. Let George Floyd's name be the last. Let his death not be in vain.

In such, we must continue pressing on toward that brighter day. I am looking forward to working with my colleagues and others to implement the following strategies and others to help Milwaukee heal and create more trust between our community and those who swear to protect and serve it:

- Request that the Fire and Police Commission immediately work with the Milwaukee Police Department to train officers on positional asphyxiation to prevent an incident like what happened in Minneapolis from happening in Milwaukee
- Introduce a resolution requesting the State of Wisconsin mandate that law enforcement officers who are suspended or charged with a violent offense on-duty or not, cease receiving a salary while under investigation
- Request that the mayor work with the community to get the Fire and Police Commission to nine members
- Request the Fire and Police Commission implement more robust complaint tracing, in order to bring the management of citizen complaints in line with the recommendations of the Crime and Justice Institute in fulfillment of the ACLU settlement agreement
- Request that the Fire and Police Commission ensure that there are proactive, early intervention processes and procedures in place to address complaints, investigations, and patterns of behavior in officers

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- Request that there is a full review of all complaints and investigations on file to look for unaddressed patterns in behavior and gaps in supervisory monitoring and oversight
- Request that the Milwaukee Police Department engage with local leaders to discuss community-oriented strategies to address unrest
- Request that the Fire and Police Commission redouble its recruitment efforts in our neighborhoods so that our fire and police agencies are more reflective of the communities that they serve
- Request appropriate departments report progress on and expedite the implementation of strategies to address systemic violence, as requested by the community and outlined in the Blueprint For Peace, including:
 1. Continue law enforcement training in the areas of crisis intervention, fair and impartial policing, and procedural justice
 2. Expand implicit bias and micro-aggression reduction and de-escalation training to include first responders, mental health providers, community health workers, and other partners
 3. Provide increased opportunities for government-community partnerships and trust-building
 4. Sustain and expand existing community-oriented and problem-solving policing efforts, with the goal of building and strengthening relationships, trust, and legitimacy throughout the community