



Cavalier Johnson

City of Milwaukee Common Council

President Johnson seeks 10% MPD budget reduction in 2021 to be reallocated for vital community needs

**Statement of Common Council President Cavalier Johnson
June 15, 2020**

Today, a file was introduced with the purpose of directing the City of Milwaukee's budget office to prepare a model 2021 police department budget showing a 10% reduction in resources. Those resources would instead be reallocated to critical community needs such as housing, the health department and violence prevention, as well as funding the work of the Community Collaborative Commission.

I co-sponsored that legislation and I did so with the ideas that I presented last week for police reform in mind. I believe that the conversations around police reform and reallocation of resources are intertwined and must happen simultaneously and not in separate siloes.

Let's keep in mind that the 2020 police budget consumes just over 45% of the City's general fund revenues compared to funding for the Milwaukee Public Library (at just under 4%) and the Milwaukee Health Department at just over 2% for the same year. In fact, for the last few years, the budget of the police department captures every single property tax dollar generated in the city plus several million more and in 2021, as in years past, the police department is asking for more.

Couple that with the fact that the state shared revenue program that in the past paid the entirety of the cost of the police department and left the city with millions of additional dollars to invest in infrastructure and other areas, is simply broken and we have a funding system that is simply unsustainable.

These issues collide after the death of yet another African American, George Floyd, in police custody and endless protests in streets across the United States and around the globe calling for systemic change to American policing.

Look at the protests in Milwaukee, New York City, Paris, Chicago, Seoul, Wausau, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, and so many other cities and countries around the world. Listen to their cries. Hear their passion. Know their determination. Witness their diversity. This I believe is a critical inflection point and an opportunity for our city to meet this moment in history.

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As we discuss the options presented in the model budget that will be presented to the Common Council, all of us should understand and affirm the fact that policing is a difficult, dangerous, but also very necessary profession. We can both appreciate the strides made by our local police department over the course of the last two years and also recognize that those strides came about because there have been problems that necessitated those changes. We can do that just the same as we can both recognize that Mr. Floyd's death was caused by a law enforcement officer more than 300 miles away, and recognize that the same institutional problems have created a list of names of African Americans who have died by law enforcement here in Milwaukee.

Police and community are symbiotic — we need each other. But it's also true that it is past time for that relationship to be re-examined so that we can address the historical, institutionalized problems that have created systemic oppression and far too many deaths for African Americans, people of color, and other affected groups in this country for decades and indeed centuries.

I look forward to the robust conversation that I know will follow behind the introduction of this legislation. I also very much look forward to the model 2021 budget that the administration will present for the Council's consideration.

It must be noted that city officials have been and continue to be bombarded with emails from residents of Milwaukee, southeastern Wisconsin, and from across the state encouraging us to capitalize on this moment and shift resources from policing to prevention and the front side of people's lives. I would be derelict in my duty if I did not mention that changes in policing cannot only be contained to America's largest cities. Would change really be realized if an African American experiences the same struggles and oppression once they cross the municipal or county line? Don't the African Americans who live beyond the city limits in communities in adjacent counties deserve the same protections and justice that are being advocated for in Milwaukee and other large American cities?

Yes, they do and so for these calls to reach their highest and best utility, they must be applied generally and echoed by state and federal action and not just in large population centers.

We know that investing in education, health care, quality housing, fully funded and far reaching transportation, and other social determinants of health lays the foundation for all of our citizens to grow into productive, contributing members of society. That's what folks are asking for — a chance to actually live. Plus, making these front end investments only stands to make the job of policing easier in the long run. We don't need to study these things, we know them. We don't need to create a new body to look at these things, we're aware. Now is the time to move forward to the next step and by examining the financial impacts for the first time, we are moving into waters yet to be explored.

Rest assured that until some actual change is realized, the marching in the streets will continue as the organizers have commented that they are prepared to break Milwaukee's standing record of consecutive days of marching against injustice. That's more than 200 days of protests and I for one, believe them, support them, and will continue peacefully marching alongside them.

Know justice. Know peace.