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CAVALIER JOHNSON
COMMON COUNCIL PRESIDENT
ALDERMAN, 2ND DISTRICT

It's time for the MPD and FPC to move forward

Statement of Common Council President Cavalier Johnson August 7, 2020

Milwaukee is home to one of the most powerful police oversight bodies in the United States. The key to the power enshrined in the Fire and Police Commission is the fact that citizens have the final say in the direction of two critical public-facing city departments. Citizens institute changes and decide whether to promote individuals through the ranks. They have the power to appoint as well as remove the heads of our fire and police departments. Those powers aren't relegated to the Mayor or Common Council, but to residents of our city.

Last night, the citizen-led Fire and Police Commission voted unanimously to return Chief Alfonso Morales to the rank of captain.

As chief, Morales implemented a video series that informed the public after police-involved shootings. He spearheaded an interactive crime dashboard so that residents had greater access to accurate and timely data about their neighborhood and our city. Morales also led with grace as members of his department lost their lives in the line of duty.

Twenty-seven years of rising through the ranks in service to our city should be commended and I thank Chief Morales for his dedication.

His tenure as chief, however, did not come without missteps and controversy, ultimately leading to the Fire and Police Commission action last night. Under Morales, the Milwaukee Police Department Milwaukee met protesters in the wake of George Floyd's death with chemical irritants and rubber bullets. There was reluctance to engage proactively in a discussion around re-examining the relationship between law enforcement and the community. Morales appeared unwilling and unable to authentically engage with the community in ways that honored resident's perspectives. He seemed resistant to trying to find mutual understanding with the community in order to move forward with more collaborative, equitable, and transparent policing.

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The police interview at Sojourner Family Peace Center which violated a memorandum of understanding between that organization and the Milwaukee Police Department was troubling. The unlawful release of a police file concerning an on-going investigation was harmful and dangerous to the accuser of the sexual assault allegation, the person accused of said allegation, and to the victims of sexual assault and abuse who are fearful to put their trust in police officers. It also sowed a further mistrust in the process behind which these types of matters are conducted.

Last night the Fire and Police Commission elected a new chairperson to lead them moving forward. Upon his acceptance of this position, Nelson Soler expressed the need to put the drama behind us and get to work improving these important public institutions, both the Milwaukee Police Department and the Fire and Police Commission. I couldn't agree more and look forward to working together to this end.

At this juncture, we need to move forward to rebuilding trust and partner in re-examining community-police relations. My hope is that now Acting Chief Brunson can move forward in laying a foundation of collaboration. It is critical that our law enforcement build trusting, mutual, and authentic relationships with all of the members of the community that they are sworn to both protect and serve.

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