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FOR INFORMATION CALL

June 16, 2005

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Police Sergeant Deserves Praise For Pointing Out Possible Racial Bias In Police Shootings, Flaws In Inquest Process

*Three Aldermen See Sergeant as Exemplifying Best of Police Department, Are
Encouraged That MPD's Relationship With Community Can Be Improved*

The honesty and courage shown by a Milwaukee Police sergeant during questioning about the investigation into the 2003 fatal police shooting of Justin Fields is praiseworthy and could signal the beginning of a new relationship between the police department and the community, three Common Council members said today.

“In a time in our city’s history when police misconduct is dominating media attention and public debate, it is refreshing to see Sgt. Harold Hampton – a dedicated City of Milwaukee police officer – stepping forward and honoring the oath he took to protect and serve all of our citizens,” said Ald. Willie C. Wade.

The recently-released deposition testimony of Sgt. Hampton, the lead internal police investigator into the shooting that took the life of Fields, 21, was groundbreaking in that Hampton stated under oath that the head of the MPD’s internal affairs division at that time – a white officer – ignored his findings that the officer involved in the shooting (who is also white) violated several departmental rules during the incident involving Fields, a black man, including pursuing Fields’ car while two unrestrained white detainees were in the back of the squad car.

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Police Sergeant Earns Praise For Stepping Forward/ADD ONE

Sgt. Hampton also said he believes the Fields shooting and other shootings of unarmed drivers by Milwaukee police officers have a racial component to them, in part, because of bias or inadequate training on serving as an officer in the inner city.

In describing how his findings of serious wrongdoing by the officer in the Fields case were simply ignored by a superior and thus never presented to the inquest jury, Hampton's testimony clearly reveals serious flaws in the inquest process in Milwaukee, Ald. Ashanti Hamilton said.

"While pointing out the problems with the inquest process may not be popular, it is a necessary step in correcting the obvious shortcomings that have been tolerated in Milwaukee for too long," said Ald. Hamilton, an attorney who serves as vice chair of the council's Judiciary & Legislation Committee.

Ald. Mike McGee, Jr. said Sgt. Hampton has been a "fine and honorable addition" to Police Chief Nannette Hegerty's management staff. "By exposing some injustices within the department, Sgt. Hampton has helped to destroy the perception that a solid 'blue shield' exists and he's shown that the code of silence among officers may be a myth," said Ald. McGee.

"In light of this situation, Sgt. Hampton has helped to provide more credibility to a department that has come under intense attack and criticism over the past year," Ald. McGee said.

One collateral effect of Sgt. Hampton's testimony, Ald. Wade said, is the prospect of better relations between the police department and a community that has – to an extent – lost its trust in its police officers. "I believe that the officers who have brought shame upon the Milwaukee Police Department are but a few, and that the majority of the men and women on the department are good, professional, hard-working officers who have integrity – officers like Sgt. Hampton," he said.

"I am hopeful that Sgt. Hampton's willingness to step forward can help to strengthen the relationship between residents and the police and that it will help repair some of the damage that's been done," said Ald. Wade.

"The Milwaukee police need the people of Milwaukee on their side," he said.