

Statement by the Burlington Police Commission regarding the killing of George Floyd:

“George Floyd’s killing by officers in the Minneapolis Police Department was tragic and unjust; our thoughts are with his family and friends and all who have been moved to register their voices of protest. We are sadly aware that George Floyd’s killing, while horrific, was not unique; too many people (in particular black people and other people of color) have been killed or otherwise mistreated by police officers across the country.

There are systemic inequalities and injustices that permeate every aspect of society, and problems in policing are merely one manifestation of those. And while we must collectively take steps to address those systemic inequalities, we on the Burlington Police Commission are particularly tasked with looking at, and trying to improve, injustices that are brought to the surface in policing.

The challenges are enormous and resistant to easy fixes, but we believe that policing can be improved. We want to commend the Chief of the Minneapolis Police Department for quickly and decisively firing all of the officers who neglected their duties in the George Floyd killing; we want to commend the Hennepin County Attorney for filing initial charges against one of the officers involved; and we want to commend the Minnesota Attorney General for taking over the case and bringing further charges against the other three officers. We also want to commend all of the police chiefs across the country who spoke up to immediately condemn the actions they saw on the videos, including Interim Chief Morrison of Burlington Police Department, and we want to commend those police unions around the country who also forcefully spoke out against the police actions captured on video that were inconsistent with their training and incompatible with a respect for the humanity of those they serve. While there is a danger that these are mere words, they are also words that would have been unimaginable to hear twenty years ago, and we are hopeful that these words can be an indication that there is a growing willingness to take on the difficult task of improving policing.

Policing is fundamentally a state and local issue; police cultures and policies and practices in one department need not determine culture and policies and practices in another. We are therefore focused on the Burlington Police Department, and our hope is to work with those officers of BPD, and those chiefs, and their partners on City Council and in the Mayor’s Office, who are similarly concerned by past policing injustices and who are committed to improving policing in the future. We do believe that there are those in the Burlington Police Department, and on City

Council, and in the Mayor's office, who want to improve policing practices, eliminate unjust policing, hold officers who violate their responsibilities accountable, and thereby engender greater trust in the community.

In order to improve policing in Burlington we on the Police Commission are specifically working on the following things among others:

- Relieving the burden on officers to police homelessness, mental health crises, substance use disorders, and the like by developing pilot programs for alternatives to policing and strengthening partnerships with community and social work organizations;
- Updating the current Use of Force Policy to clearly require of officers that they de-escalate whenever possible, and that officers have an affirmative duty to intervene if they see another officer committing unnecessary harm;
- Working to ensure that every member of BPD, from the time they start training at the Academy through the time they are a sworn officer, sees every member of the community as fully possessing of dignity and humanity, regardless of their race and regardless of the circumstances that led to their interaction with the police;
- Reestablishing trust by ensuring that good policies are in place to guide officer behavior, and that mechanisms exist to hold officers who violate their professional duties accountable;
- Ensuring greater transparency and democratic participation in the setting of BPD priorities, values, and resources;
- Keeping the voice of the community in the room whenever policing decisions are made.

We mourn George Floyd's death, just as we grieve for all those in our community and in communities across the country who have been mistreated. We hope that our collective grief can be channeled in a productive way, to help create a more just and equitable world going forward.”