

Mayor Farmer, Vice-Mayor Soden and Commissioners,

In regards to the proposed ad hoc group of community members to review the practices of our police department in light of national policing issues it is important we remember that Ferguson, MO and Baltimore, MD are both communities with police departments that have a long, long history of problems interacting with their communities and corrupt city government. These are not problems we have in Lawrence. The other police issues we are hearing about in the media are individual officers here and there, “bad apples” not entire departments.

Looking at police issues on a national level one can’t help but look at the big picture which includes the criminals that are killing law enforcement officers. There aren’t any riots or burning buildings, there isn’t any looting and there isn’t any media outrage about this police issue so you may not realize that from May 4-24, 2015 eight law enforcement officers were killed by criminals. Seven were shot and killed and one was intentionally struck and killed by a vehicle. Only last September less than 30 miles away in Topeka a police officer was assassinated by a criminal. Just last week less than 3 hours away in Omaha an officer was gunned down by a criminal.

The selfless men and women that protect our Lawrence community are very much aware that they wear a target on their back. They know their brothers and sisters are being killed. They know they have a dangerous and difficult profession. However lately it is being made more difficult because they are the ones being questioned because of the behavior of a few. According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund website there are over 900,000 sworn law enforcement officers in the United States. That means that a majority of law enforcement are doing their job right. Most importantly our Lawrence Kansas Police Department (LKPD) is doing it right.

We don’t have the problems that you hear about in the media. If you create an ad-hoc group to start reviewing our Department because of national issues you will be sending a negative message not only to our Department but to our community. If you want to focus on police issues because of what is happening on a national level then, with all due respect, focus your attention in a positive manner. Focus on supporting our local law enforcement. Our LKPD is not the Ferguson or Baltimore police. Our City government isn’t Ferguson or Baltimore and the Lawrence community isn’t Ferguson or Baltimore. We are blessed to have dedicated men and women of integrity in our police department.

This is the time for our City Leaders to be assuring these selfless men and women that you have their back, that you appreciate the professionalism with which they do their job, their dedication to our community and the sacrifice they make protecting us. More importantly this is a time for our leaders to be reminding our community that our LKPD is built on selfless, well trained, passionate, empathetic and dedicated men and women of integrity committed to serving our community. These are difficult times for law enforcement let’s support the professional Department we have instead of looking for problems that don’t exist.

Sincerely,

Michelle Derusseau

Cc: Diane Stoddard, Interim City Manager
Tarik Khatib, Chief of Police