
Officer Morale: Defund Police Protests

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To: email: "dcampbell@ashevillenc.gov Debra Campbell" , email: "dzack@ashevillenc.gov David Zack" , email: "bbranham@ashevillenc.gov Brad Branham"

Hello,

I'm writing to you with some major concerns about the impact of ongoing protests, the police investigation and council's recent budget decision on our police force. Has it altered their attitude and willingness to serve the community?

I can imagine, the word "defund" in itself has caused some community-wide alarm and angst. It can be very threatening to the public's idea of safety and officers job security. How is the police force processing this all? From conversations with former police chiefs, there is some agreement about the types of services officers feel less qualified to handle; that along with being overwhelmed by some of the social root causes of criminality. Is "community reinvestment" the shared understanding here?

I'm asking these questions out of general concern, but mainly because of imminent fear. Throughout history when there has been drastic change in legislation and executive action, specifically civil-rights legislation, there's always been some form of backlash, specifically white backlash.

I don't mean to offend our officers, just presenting my truth..... What could "blue backlash" look like in our community policing and has this begun to wield it's head beyond our acknowledgement? I suspect it has when I see unchecked Mr. Rondell Lance, former-officer/vigilante, inciting protestors and interfering with officer duties OR when KKK affiliated, gun-toting, mural counter-protesters escape reprimand and arrest when clearly breaking law. This to me is officer complicity and silent protest aka backlash.

Both instances give me pause and cause deeper contemplation. Policing is a thankless job, I'm guilty, and in this season of heightened scrutiny I imagine their fight for legitimacy. Police legitimacy is linked to the degree of public support, but with that in question and constantly confronted, I want to know if the recent "critical incident" reporting is less about keeping council informed and more an act of proving relevance. Silent counter-protest.

This appears seemingly harmless, but I'm curious about intent because there is a more extreme side. What happens when officers feel less supported by their community and worn down by the psychological trauma of that thinking? Will it produce less than acceptable and quality policing? And to be frank about my probing, will this have the most effects on communities and people of color?

I want to believe that our officers are upright, but I hope you hear me. Retaliatory arrests, charge stacking, procedural injustice and over sentencing are the focus of this email and concern.

I hope that someone is having these conversations with our officers, looking out for officers who appear worn out and down by the defund and racialized rhetoric, hypervigilant about using EPIC-style training in cases of over stimulation and irritation.

Most of the community is not against law enforcement, but are committed to finding alternative ways to provide higher quality community interventions. We understand that American policing holds so many

paradoxes and complexities. For that reason, it's hard to find a way to support and care for one or both without neglecting to stand in solidarity with the other.

Sheneika Smith
