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ALDERMAN, 8TH DISTRICT

The perfect storm: It could be one bad summer

Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan

April 27, 2017

I have good reason to be fearful of what this summer could have in store for us, Milwaukee.

I feel obligated as a public official to be forthright and honest with my constituents, and the citizens of Milwaukee, and from what I am seeing come across my desk – and in what I am hearing daily from constituents – I have great concern for public safety in the coming months. We all know the challenges warm weather brings us.

As a public official, it's frustrating to me that we are not able to respond to many of the calls for police service we receive on a daily basis. The bottom line is we are inundated with calls and requests for police service, and it will be very difficult for city leaders to be able to deliver on promises to our residents given the current staffing situation with the Milwaukee Police Department.

The cold hard fact is this: The demands for police service in Milwaukee far outweigh our ability to deliver those services.

Please consider the following:

- As of today, we have 120 fewer officers responding to calls for service than we did at this time last year. That is in addition to the fact that as of last year, we had roughly 200 fewer officers than we did in 2008. This steady decline in staffing has consequences.
- Calls for police service are increasing significantly, and priority 3 calls (vehicle crash with damage, unlawful entry, battery, violation of restraining order, just to name a few) are up over 50% since last month alone! The MPD simply does not have the resources to keep up, and this has resulted in many waiting several hours for a police response.

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- Both the MPD and elected officials have received a growing number of requests from all across Milwaukee (and rightfully so) for increased traffic enforcement, for more foot and bike patrol officers and for a police response to prostitution and drug dealing. All of these requests, although necessary, continue to burden a short-staffed and overwhelmed department.
- It is also my understanding that the NTF (Neighborhood Task Force) is at its lowest staffing level since its inception. The number of Detectives has also declined, and at a time when they are experiencing an increased demand for their investigation of violent crimes, arson and other criminal activity. This has also resulted in a serious decline in our homicide clearance rate.
- For a variety of reasons, officers are retiring in droves and at a much higher rate than had been anticipated. In the last 18 months alone, we have lost over 3,100 years of law enforcement experience and it is being replaced by rookies. This too, has consequences.

Something else to consider; with the continued challenges we face regarding violent crime, it's not uncommon to tie up a dozen officers or more at one crime scene, (immediate search for suspects, crowd control, traffic control, evidence gathering, door to door interviews, etc.). Those officers are simply not available to respond to other calls for service or to proactively patrol our neighborhoods. Much of the same holds true with fatal auto accidents.

No matter how hard some may try to dance around the issue, we simply no longer have the police resources to combat the public safety challenges here in Milwaukee, and although the MPD is not the only answer to our many public safety challenges, the reality is this - police officers are necessary and irreplaceable when it comes to order maintenance, neighborhood stability, and law enforcement.

I understand that turning this around will take a monumental effort on the part of many. But the near future does not appear too rosy.

In this year's coming budget, the City will probably have to contribute upwards of \$50 million into the employee pension system which is at least \$40 million more than last year. In addition, we can expect to incur up to \$25 million in damages from pending lawsuits.

My intent here is not to place blame or point fingers. My only interest is in leveling with the citizens of Milwaukee. We all live in this City and we all deserve to know the truth when it comes to the ability of the police to respond when we need their help.

As for our summer? I suggest we fasten our seatbelts – it's going to be a bumpy ride.