



KING COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
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Mitzi G. Johanknecht
Sheriff

July 15, 2020

The Honorable Joe McDermott
Chair, Committee of the Whole
Room 1200
King County Courthouse

Dear Councilmember McDermott,

I am writing to express my disappointment and deep concern regarding the unusual process which had the impact of suppressing the expression of disparate views at Tuesday's Committee of the Whole meeting.

The King County Sheriff's Office, and the diverse communities we serve, have a large stake in Proposed Ordinance 2020-0205 and Proposed Ordinance 2020-0231, making amendments to the County Charter. We were invited to have a representative present to comment and answer member questions. Although Undersheriff Patricia Cole-Tindall sat through the entire discussion of both proposed ordinances, and accompanying striking amendments, she was only acknowledged by council staff as being present, but not provided the opportunity for comment. Because there has been no work done on proposed ordinance 2020-0231, the community impacted has likewise been prevented from any meaningful input. While Proposed Ordinance 2020-0231 was the subject of multiple discussions and analysis by the Charter Review Committee, over the course of the past year, Proposed Ordinance 2020-0231 was only made available last week and now the Council is poised to adopt it next week.

The messaging on Council activity has been unclear, which further detracts from meaningful public comment in a manner that cannot be due to challenges related to working from home. For example, Monday's special meeting of the Committee of the Whole, which was initially a Facebook Town Hall, was supposed to include public comment. Late Sunday afternoon, Councilmember Kohl-Welles sent an email to constituents providing an update that there would not be public comment at Monday's meeting. I know of community members who, after signing up in good faith to be heard, were only notified Monday that **they would not be able to make public comment**. Council did allow for the reading of written questions, but not all of the questions submitted by email were read. In fact many tough questions for Council were left on the table. This left many community members without the vital answers they were seeking. If this Proposed Ordinance is ultimately passed, it should happen only after a complete, transparent and public process.

I ran for Sheriff on a platform of reform. I was among the first law enforcement officers in the state to openly support I-940. Since taking office, we have made significant changes and key improvements to our Use of Force policies and our Internal Investigations reporting procedures and I am currently working with key community stakeholders on further improvements to policy and procedure. When it became clear that our policies may not be fully aligned with the 8 Can't Wait policing reform agenda, we immediately asked for an audit from the organization. Within 5 working days, and unprecedented buy in from our affected bargaining units, we clarified and strengthened language in those policy areas.

I collaborated with the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight (OLEO), and adopted their input, to refine and evolve In-Service training for our commissioned staff. I am also working closely with the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) on a larger reform agenda for the next state legislative session, which includes standardizing use of force policies and training centered on the cornerstone principle of the sanctity of human life. The legislative agenda can be found here: https://www.waspc.org/assets/docs/2020_0625%20Gov%20Inslee_House_Senate_Reforms.pdf

Sheriff's Office practices are also aligned with the principles of Equity and Social Justice. I was the first Sheriff to make Implicit Bias Training mandatory for all members, including professional staff. We also made the training available to other agencies who couldn't afford it, and even offered it to council staff. We now have a full-time U/T Visa coordinator who also provides community outreach, education and assistance for our immigrant populations. And, I am working with Public Health Seattle King County, serving on a committee focused on a regional approach to the reduction of youth and gun violence.

I understand the stated interest from several members of Council to focus on meaningful reform, but I strongly disagree that your tactics are necessary to meet that goal and I note that, with three exceptions, Council has not contacted me directly with any suggested reforms. Only Councilmembers, Kathy Lambert, Reagan Dunn and Pete von Reichbauer, have contacted me to discuss reforms since the brutal and unfathomable death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. I agree with them that reforms are necessary and urgent. I would appreciate an explanation of why I haven't heard reform proposals directly from you or your colleagues who are sponsoring these two pieces of legislation. I would think the public is also interested in your specific solutions and why you contend that significant changes to the County charter are needed, when there have been no attempts to effect changes in the direct way that our constituents expect.

I will reiterate that the best path forward is collaboration between Council, Sheriff's Office, OLEO, labor groups and the community. Council's lack of meaningful process and transparency adversely impacts informed public participation. Our understanding of the draft is that it also attempts to circumvent state law by narrowing the Sheriff's authority to whatever role the Council assigns, rather than the broad scope of authority provided by our legislature. I sincerely hope you will take a closer look at the need for process and provide proper review and discussion before undertaking approval of proposed ordinance 2020-231.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,


Mitzi G. Johanknecht
SHERIFF