

June 4, 2020

Griselda Aldrete  
Executive Director  
Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission  
200 E. Wells St  
Room 705  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Ms. Aldrete:

Thank you and the Fire and Police Commission Board for your request for community input as it pertains to Milwaukee Police Chief Morales' six-month review on July 16th, 2020. We have written this letter based on our personal experiences having followed Mr. Morales' tenure closely since his first interim appointment on February 15th, 2018 and from listening to reactions of members of the LIT community. Additionally, the African American Roundtable and Black Leaders Organizing for Communities surveyed the communities for feedback; we are including several comments received anonymously from residents<sup>1</sup>. We have organized this letter using the framework of feedback you requested.

### **Leadership**

When sworn in, Chief Morales said that he would be, "putting every bit of effort that [he] can into really rebuilding relationships in this community and [he's] going to continue to keep doing that." We were mistaken to assume that the relationships he spoke of would include us. "From me, you will receive honesty. You will know what the police department is doing to ensure our officers are prepared to serve you well," is what Chief Morales promised in his special community message [video](#). As we have all experienced from the past week in Milwaukee, Chief Morales has prioritized inciting violence on residents who are exercising their right to protest instead of protecting their rights and safety. This does not reflect honest leadership and Milwaukee police officers have not been serving us well, they have been tear gassing us. "I will also defend our officers when they are right, and admit when members of our organization are wrong," he continues in that video. We have yet to hear this admission of guilt from Chief Morales, or any Milwaukee Police Department Chief, for the violence shown by Milwaukee police officers on protesters demanding that Black Lives Matter, for the tasing of Sterling Brown in 2018, for the murder of Donte Hamilton in 2014, for the murder of Sylville Smith in 2016, and so many more.

### **Governance**

Part of Chief Morales' job is to ensure that his department is following all statutes and agreements required by law. This includes the semi-annual stop and frisk analysis reporting as part of the ACLU settlement agreement approved in 2018. The agreement requires MPD, in conjunction with the FPC, to regularly release stop and frisk data. The most recent report released February 2020 found that out of the 34,687 encounters on record between January 1st, 2019 until June 20, 2019, 38% of the stops and 80% of the "frisks" were improperly

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<sup>1</sup> A virtual survey was distributed by the African American Roundtable and Black Leaders Organizing for Communities. There have been a total of 251 respondents as of June 4th, 2020. Respondents have been quoted verbatim and all identifying information has been removed.

documented. Over 50% of the recorded encounters involved Black men. The next analysis report is expected to be released by July 23rd, 2020. We have no tolerance for the clear racial discrimination practices of the department. This data supports the personal experiences and stories shared by community members in the feedback survey results.

Chief Morales is not holding his own officers accountable to the law. When police officers commit crimes, they are not held to the same standard as the public and they are rarely punished; this tells us that they will not be held accountable and can behave without consequence. The following are examples of personal experiences and opinions of residents in Milwaukee about the department that Chief Morales oversees:

- “Chief Morales serves as a poor steward of policy and procedure and has shown zero accountability to the communities he serves.”
- “Seems like all SOPs are more in line with military substance and not community policing.”
- “We need progressive community policing. Period. End the military style of policing.”
- “Failed to address over-policing in poor areas. Did not invest in these communities’ safety but rather their subjugation.”
- “Violating people’s first amendment rights shows he does not care about the people he is charged with protecting.”
- “He allowed his PR people to lie about protestors being violent and throwing Molotov cocktails. I was there up front and did not see that. He is leading us to a war and demonizing the people he’s supposed to protect. He had a platform to do the right thing and listen to the protestors, instead he treated them like criminals. It’s innocent until proven guilty, not you’re guilty because they want us to be.”
- “Even worse than his leadership. It is his policies that have led to the police riots happening around our city. It is his policies that led to my wife being shot by 13 rubber bullets for trying to put out a gas canister thrown at a completely peaceful crowd.”
- “Many corrupt and violent cops with little to know training in mental health or de-escalation.”
- “Morales took a broken and ultimately harmful police department and somehow found the courage to make it worse. Chief Morales’s complete lack of leadership has created a department without direction, turning what should be a law enforcement and peacekeeping organization into a free-for-all of incompetence and civil rights abuses.”
- “The police in Milwaukee, like all other police departments, are vehicles for white supremacy, it doesn’t matter who is leading.”
- “He could do much better with transparency like releasing body cam footage, ensuring his police are held accountable.”
- “Needs to address over-policing and police brutality in Black communities.”
- “If Morales is the one authorizing the excessive use of force against protestors then his governance is terrible. If his officers are doing it on their own without authorization then his governance is still terrible and it shows that he has no control over the police force. Keeping the police force in check should be a major part of his job, but he has demonstrated his inability to do this. MPD assisted ICE in illegally arresting people last year, even after he said that this would not happen.”
- “I would like to see police policies change and include mandatory anti-bias training.”
- “Chief Morales has made no visible strides toward better governance of the MPD.”

## **Budget Management**

Chief Morales oversees a department that is currently allocated [\\$297,366,419 dollars](#) for the year 2020. Last November, thanks to the labor of community organizers, the budget was slightly decreased and sixty officers were cut - but the MPD budget is still way too high. 47% of the city of Milwaukee's entire budget goes to the Milwaukee Police Department, a department that has repeatedly violated human rights and the law. "Budget [is] used irresponsibly and does little to truly protect the people. So much more can be done with that money to help communities around Milwaukee," says one anonymous resident. "Police funding is about 47% of the city departmental budget in Milwaukee. Does anyone feel like Milwaukee is safer for it? Where instead could the city use those funds to keep people safe and healthy? Jobs, housing, health care, public schools, youth programs, community programs - so much could be done to make people's lives, especially Black people's lives, better. Defund the police, fund our communities," says another resident. Another resident offers an alternative investment because of the urgency of relief efforts needed in this moment: "the police seem to be doing just fine with all their equipment... maybe we shift that budget to health care workers who need supplies."

People in Milwaukee are asking, and have been for years, for the city to allocate this half of the budget towards resources, services, and programs that will build a stronger community - not in a department that harasses, racially profiles, abuses, and murders them. "...Far too much of our budget pays for policing that actually destroys community bonds long term. Other groups need some of these funds to proactively do what heavy handed policing has not done in our city in forever" --that is, protect.

As Chief of police, Morales is responsible for the behavior of his officers. One resident says MPD should "invest in de-escalation training and more psych evaluations for officers." Black and Brown residents of Milwaukee are literally paying for Chief Morales' officers to target people of color with racist practices and non-consequential behavior, thereby funding their oppression, with their own tax dollars and lives. A more useful way to spend our tax dollars would be to "support development of neighborhood organizations that help improve public safety by creating positive opportunities for young people in their own neighborhoods. These are also proven to be more effective than police in reducing crime rates and improving public safety."

At the [Community Listening Session](#) in January 2020, Morales stated that because of the 60-officer cut in the last budget, "trust in police officers would go down as officers are stretched thin across neighborhoods." This logic doesn't resonate with us because the presence of police officers doesn't increase our trust. Residents believe in "[allocating] more money on peaceful community safety initiatives rather than military tactics," and "less officers and more social workers."

MPD currently has a contract with the Milwaukee Public Schools. It is currently costing us over \$500,000 annually to police young people in and around schools. We continue to funnel in money for the School Resource Officer (SRO) program, where police officers respond to calls from schools. Residents are calling for "divestment in MPD! Black and Brown workers are paying taxes to fund police to harm and kill their families. The people of the city do not agree." This resident continues, sharing that, "as an ESL teacher in MPS, my mom does not want her funds to be contributing to the death of Black and Brown neighbors, and rather invested into her students in her school." Schools should be safe places for students to grow, not be another place where young people are criminalized. Young people deserve to have up to date materials, trained teachers who, at

minimum, make livable wages, and resources in their schools. “While police are wearing riot gear and spraying tear gas, kids in this city are learning from textbooks that are older than they are,” states one resident. This contractual partnership between MPS and MPD feeds the school to prison to detention pipeline.

### **Public Safety**

We believe that public safety means a world without police; where all people, especially Black and Brown communities, are free to live full and thriving lives. The work that we do at LIT is rooted in a constant aim at liberation and police departments do not fit the model. The Milwaukee Police Department claims to envision a Milwaukee where “all can live safely and without fear, protected by a police department with the highest ethical and professional standards” In our experiences, the way to live safely and without fear is in the absence of policing, because of the consistently racist, immoral, and unethical conduct of police officers. Examples include the homicide of Joel Acevedo by an off-duty MPD officer; an unidentified man, unrelated to the situation, who was fatally shot by police who were looking for a suspect near 7th and Maple St; the murder of 27-year old Lucas Alvarado, who was also mistaken for another suspect in another situation; the list of Milwaukee residents who had their life taken by MPD, often without “reason,” is heartbreakingly long.

MPD officers are still heavily patrolling neighborhoods of color and targeting instead of trying to build positive relationships. There are still many accounts of folks who have been victims of no-knock search warrants for unclear reasons (BLOC, LIT, and AART staff included), and are left with the trauma of feeling powerless and afraid with no answers or resolutions.

On June 3rd, 2020, Chief Morales discussed with the media his hopes for rebuilding community trust while simultaneously approving his officers to shoot tear gas into crowds of walking protesters who were expressing their demands for justice for Black lives. And the next day he walked with protesters laughing and posing for photos. There is a stark incognizance between what Morales is saying in public and the racism and violence he is perpetuating with his power. The way Morales is leading the department is decreasing public safety, “I’ve always felt safe in Milwaukee. Now I am terrified of the police.” Milwaukee is rising up and resisting the status quo of policing with their demands for their humanity to be recognized, respected, and protected - and Chief Morales’ MPD is responding with violence. We will not see peace in Milwaukee until we have seen justice.

### **SOP and Policy Changes**

The Milwaukee Police Department is in working collaboration with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), despite not being mandated to do so. In 2017, Mayor Tom Barrett [declared](#) that even though Milwaukee is not a sanctuary city, “immigrants will not be persecuted here.” Additionally, the Milwaukee Police Department has a policy that “police members shall not inform federal immigration officials of whereabouts or behavior of any suspect illegal immigrant;” Chief Morales approved six circumstances where they would collaborate to assist in the execution of administrative warrants. These six circumstances give MPD additional power to racially profile and can result in deporting and sending Milwaukeeans to detention centers. We are disgusted that Chief Morales has ignored the demands of several large-scale protests that have called for the voluntary collaboration with ICE to end.

Milwaukee police officers have used excessive force, in tear gas and other forms, daily for the past week. Within

Standard Operating Procedure 460 around excessive force, there is a “use of force” committee composed of police officers appointed by the Chief of police that meets quarterly. This constant use of excessive force is unmerited and there should be consequences for the officers and leadership involved. In the words of an anonymous Milwaukee resident, “officers should face consequences, such as termination, for use of excessive force. MPD officers need to be trained (and re-trained, and re-trained until it becomes first nature) to use de-escalation techniques versus violence as a first response.” This regular use of excessive force is unethical, dangerous, and is targeted mostly at people of color. It is adamant that Chief Morales hold his department accountable for their actions, anything less is unjust to the community. “If Chief Morales took police brutality seriously he would have fired [officer] Mattioli for murdering Joel Acevedo immediately. Morales is complicit in police violence and cannot be trusted as a leader,” says another Milwaukee resident.

### **Community Relations**

Chief Morales has claimed since before his appointment confirmation that being born and raised on the South Side of Milwaukee makes him a good fit for the role. Morales stated, “if there is ever an incident where one of our members makes a mistake, unnecessarily escalating a situation, I’m going to be honest and transparent about it.” While Morales shows a bit more transparency than his predecessor, Edward Flynn, there are still many biased and unfair practices in how officers are being disciplined as well as how they are dealing with the public. Like a resident shared, “the disproportionate policing in rich/poor, POC or Black/white communities reinforces the violence.. when people are left to fend for themselves, or are racially profiled, assaulted, murdered, arrested, convicted, or indicted, they do not feel safe nor will they trust those whose job it is to keep them safe.” Morales oversees many police officers who “make mistakes” and yet, we have seen little honesty and transparency from him, especially in situations with large community and media attention. It is clear that Morales protects his department over the people he swore to serve and protect, and at the cost of upholding racist and discriminatory institutional practices.

In recent days, Chief Morales has deployed hundreds of officers to use war tactics on the streets of Milwaukee. Hundreds of protesters have taken to the street to march for the murder of George Floyd at the hands of another police officer. People are demanding that Black Lives Matter and for police everywhere, starting with the Milwaukee Police Department, to stop murdering Black people. And the police respond by arresting and tear gassing them, this “does not keep neighborhoods safe.” Another resident directs their comment to Chief Morales, “Your ‘law enforcement’ officers (who have a history of murdering unarmed Black men with impunity) are purposefully escalating tensions with peaceful protesters.” “Shooting rubber bullets at people gathered outside peacefully makes no one feel safe. Bringing in the national guard to force protestors into doesn’t make people feel safe,” says another. Chief Morales has shown little ability to make the systemic changes needed in Milwaukee.

LIT attended an event with the Milwaukee Bucks where Chief Morales was invited to participate. Morales and other police officers attended, some with their guns and badges on display. High school students had conversations with him, bringing up their concerns about racial discrimination and police brutality. Morales responded to their concerns by stating that they (MPD) plays basketball with young people, that he fires some employees, and that he has his captains host community events. Morales displayed obvious avoidance when addressing the systemic violence that the students wanted to discuss. He did not respect the young people enough to differentiate between his band aid solutions and the structural change that is needed. Students were

further disappointed when they asked the questions again and Chief Morales did not respond with sufficient or acceptable answers. Morales showed a condescending demeanor that made students feel patronized and unheard. He even went so far as to point fingers at the young people who don't feel comfortable engaging in those MPD efforts, neglecting that this is due to justified distrust and a lack of confidence in the same weak measures that have failed them many times before.

Chief Morales released a message via YouTube encouraging Milwaukee to comply with the "safer at home" orders issued by Governor Tony Evers on March 25th, 2020. Morales mentioned that Milwaukee police officers "will be in the community working to educate everyone and reduce that confusion" that might arise from the orders. MPD officers do not have the relationships, leadership, or mentality to be a safe resource to Black and Brown people in Milwaukee. An anonymous resident says, "communities throughout Milwaukee do not trust the police, or Chief Morales. [He] has continued the MPD trend of dishonesty, violence, and unethical behavior, and the distrust among the community reflects this."

Again, we thank you for your request for community feedback. While there is more to say, we hope that this is the beginning of several feedback requests where our recommendations are heard and validated through policy and accountability change.

Sincerely,

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Maya Neal, Leaders Igniting Transformation

Dakota Hall, Leaders Igniting Transformation

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