



CITY OF FAIRBANKS

Jim Matherly, Mayor
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NAACP – Greater Fairbanks Branch
P.O. Box 84437
Fairbanks, AK 99708

Re: City Response to NAACP Position Statement on Policing and our Community

Dear Members of the NAACP Unit #1001,

I have received and reviewed your position statement on policing and our community. I am happy to hear that the NAACP holds the conviction that all residents in Fairbanks have the right to respectful, safe, and equitable police protection and conduct regardless of age, race, gender, religion, sexuality, mental, or physical status, as that is the same conviction held by the Fairbanks Police Department and my administration.

While I appreciate that you recognize the need of the police department for the prevention of violence in our community, I'm somewhat perplexed that you have listed what your beliefs for a fully-functioning police department should be without also acknowledging how the Fairbanks Police Department and my administration is already meeting these requirements. Specifically:

- A diverse interview committee has already been created to participate in the hiring of the new police chief. The makeup of this diverse committee of civilian representatives was made public and detailed in a press release from my office dated November 18, 2020. While city code allows me to select a new police chief without the participation of any other parties, I made the decision (as I did the last time we hired a chief) to instead have an open and transparent hiring process and invite a diverse selection of community members to participate, as I feel that their different backgrounds and areas of expertise will be beneficial to the process. With that, I am honored that your President was the first person appointed as a member on that committee. I do not plan on increasing the size of this nine-seat committee, as a nine-member interview panel is already quite large.

- The Fairbanks Police Department has a rigorous training schedule which includes implicit bias training, race relations, cultural sensitivity, and de-escalation training, among many other areas of law enforcement that require training. The on-going training that FPD receives is not reactive to any particular event, but rather, proactive, with the ideology that training in all areas of policing saves lives. We have publicly stated on many occasions that we put a high priority on training and have informed the community of specific trainings that we receive. FPD has had several of these types of trainings this year and have expanded some to include all city employees.
- With the number of mental health concerns ever rising in our community, it is important to address each situation quickly and effectively. Fairbanks Police officers have a unique perspective on the mental health crisis in Fairbanks as many times they are the first responders that are interacting and assisting those in crisis. In the past five and a half years, FPD has responded to over 1,200 calls related to suicide, as well as numerous other welfare checks, many of which were related to mental health. Recognizing that both citizens and officers benefit from collaboration with mental health professionals, we have strived to form partnerships to have a united response to mental health in our community. Most recently, I have put forward a resolution (Resolution 4943) to request funds from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services for a grant that would allow behavioral health providers to respond with first responders in certain situations. This resolution is on the agenda for tonight.
- The Fairbanks Police Department has oversight by my office, Human Resources, and the City Council, on matters regarding policy, personnel, hiring, and more. Officers are also held to certain requirements by the Alaska Police Standards Council.

While it seems that my administration and the current state of FPD align very closely with your stated beliefs, the "background" section of your statement says that this document "is in response to the systematic oppression, discrimination, and unjustifiable murders of people of color in the United States, here in Fairbanks, and around our state" without stating how that relates to FPD. I take issue if you are implying that unjustifiable murders are being committed by FPD officers, as that is simply not factual. All police-involved shootings by our officers were investigated by the Office of Special Prosecution, which is an outside agency independent from any influence from the City of Fairbanks. It has been found in these cases that the use of deadly force was reasonably necessary for officers to defend themselves and others from the imminent threat of death or serious physical injury.

You also reference an officer that was formerly with FPD that was involved in three separate incidents that involved fatalities. This officer had the misfortune being on-duty three separate times when the criminal actions of others led to him being in the terrible position of making the hard, but legal and justifiable, decision of using lethal force in order to keep our community safe. Knowing the details of these cases, including one case in which someone was firing out of their vehicle on a busy road at officers and trying to run people over, make me feel very proud that this officer chose to put himself in harm's way to prevent further tragedy in our community. I choose to stand with those who are protecting our community, not those committing criminal acts of violence. I ask that you stand with me to support our officers that are doing this job for you, me, and everyone else that lives in Fairbanks.

In the last five and a half years, there have been over 130,000 law enforcement calls dealt with by Fairbanks Police Department, and FPD strives to make every contact with the public excellent. If there is an allegation of wrongdoing, the Fairbanks Police Department and the City will (and consistently has) investigated the allegation to the fullest extent possible and will provide a documented conclusion as to the outcome of the investigation. If an officer is found to have violated a policy or procedure, they are held accountable and appropriate discipline, up to termination or criminal charges, take place. Fairbanks Police Department and I expect nothing less than excellence from our officers and we strive to provide unconditional respect to our community members. After all, the members of the Fairbanks Police Department are also members of this community and have a vested interest in helping grow this community into a place we can all be happy to call home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jim Matherly', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jim Matherly