



MINNEOTA POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Police Chief Bill Bolt

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February 3, 2021

To: Minnesota State Representative Brian Johnson

Reference: Proposed changes for law enforcement

Mr. Johnson,

Experience and Training,

I have been a licensed police officer in the state of Minnesota for almost 22 years. During that time I have worked for several rural law enforcement agencies. My experience started while I attended Alexandria Technical College where I received my AAS in law enforcement. I have completed the leadership training courses through the BCA as well as the Minnesota Chief of Police Association. I have 10 years of experience as a Patrol Sergeant and 6 years as a Police Chief. In 2015 I served on an ad-hoc committee with the MN POST Board where we reviewed law enforcement training standards for use of force, deadly force, and firearms. I am currently on the MN POST Board Rules Review and Overhaul advisory committee as well as the DPS Use of Deadly Force advisory committee. I am also a Use of Force and Firearms instructor with POST approved classes. I have also been trained as an EMT and a fireman.

Lexipol – Law Enforcement Department Policies

I have heard that Minnesota is considering legislation that would require all law enforcement agencies to use Lexipol for their department policies. If this is true I ask that you do whatever you can to prevent this from happening. Here is a list of my reasons:

01: A statewide policy fails to appreciate the differences in agencies in regards to size, structure, and resources. Based upon my review of Lexipol I believe it is best suited for large agencies and does nothing to better the smaller rural agencies which make up the majority of law enforcement agencies in the state. The cost of Lexipol is also a burden on small communities who operate on very tight budgets.

02: In speaking with Lexipol I was told that I could make changes and edit the policies to fit my agency and community needs. While this is true it raises the question as to, “Why would I need to get rid of my current policy and adopt another which I would end up changing so significantly that it would not be in line with the original Lexipol policy.” I have spoken with other leaders in

law enforcement who currently use Lexipol and they told me they had to make significant changes to make Lexipol work for their agency.

03: A one size fits all approach fails to recognize the differences between large and small agencies as well as large and small communities. For example: While we have state statutes that cover the entire state, communities also have local ordinances to address the needs that are unique to that community. The policies of a law enforcement agency must respect, reflect and appreciate the uniqueness of the communities they serve. Minnesota has such diversity that a statewide policy would never meet the needs of every community.

Solution -

Policy concerns/improvements are best handled at the local level by the law enforcement agency working with city or county administration, city or county legal representation and in coordination with the MN POST Board, League of Minnesota Cities or Counties, Chief's and Sheriff's organizations and the MPPOA.

Qualified Immunity

I have heard that Minnesota is considering legislation that would end qualified immunity for police officers and require officers to self insure. If this is true I ask that you do whatever you can to prevent this from happening. Here is a list of my reasons:

01: Without qualified immunity, a police officer would be subject to coercion by criminals who would use the threat of a lawsuit to intimidate officers and dictate how officers enforce the law. Every officer I know has been threatened with, "I am going to sue you and your department for everything you have", or "I am going to have your badge", or "If you arrest me I am going to sue you for" Even if the officer was 100% correct in their actions, that officer could face financial ruin by simply defending themselves from a false accusation. Why would any officer want to respond to a call, make a traffic stop or be proactive if they risk the loss of all they have worked for?

02: I have spoken with my insurance provider who is also a broker. They said they could not find any insurance group that would provide insurance for an officer that would take the place of qualified immunity and they suspected that if a policy could be written it would cost several thousands of dollars each year. I am confident that insurance companies would consider such policies as carrying a great deal of liability based upon recent events in police work along with the large settlement payments being made. Also, the cost of such insurance premiums would be passed on to the city through labor contracts and would result in many rural departments closing down because they could no longer financially fund their agencies.

Police Reform and Best Practices

Based upon the committees which I am currently part of as well as my review of the MN POST Board audit along with my training and experience I encourage all involved to take a step

back and reconsider what they are proposing and how it will impact the entire state and not just the metro agencies.

01: If you are looking for best practices in policing and interacting with communities I encourage you to look at those small agencies that have less than 4 officers on staff. Those agencies have been forced by necessity to work with their communities to improve everyone's quality of life. A lack of resources requires creativity. A lack of back-up requires improved communication skills. The fact that today's suspect maybe tomorrow's victim and the next day's witness means that relationships are essential for success.

02: As a small-town Chief my goal is to help people live a productive and meaningful life. For those who violate the law, there must be accountability but I also put just as much effort into helping them become productive members of the community. I focus, and teach my part-time officers, to seek behavior change, and we use a variety of methods to accomplish this goal.

In closing

Just as no two people are the same so too are communities and agencies. A statewide approach to police reform fails to acknowledge and appreciate what we have been doing for years in rural Minnesota. A top-down, one-size-fits-all, metro-focused, micromanaged approach to police reform punishes and makes the job more difficult for good officers, agencies, and communities who have not violated the public trust or their oath of office. If there is a problem with an agency I encourage "THEIR" community to deal with "THEIR" agency directly so that they achieve the "LOCAL" reform "THEY" want and need. It is wrong and harmful to impose those changes on other agencies and communities to accomplish "THEIR" goals of local reform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Bolt". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "B" and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chief Bill Bolt