



MILWAUKEE COMMON COUNCIL

City Hall Room 205, 200 E. Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202 • (414) 286-2221 • Fax (414) 286-3456 • www.milwaukee.gov/council

October 10, 2019

Representative Janel Brandtjen
WI State Assembly
PO Box 8952
Madison WI 53708

Dear Representative Brandtjen:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Mayor's budget proposal to eliminate 60 police officer positions. We appreciate your concern for our police officers and our citizens. None of us wants to eliminate these positions but we may not have much of a choice. As the Wisconsin Policy Forum so aptly described, "we are between a rock and a hard place."

State law restricts our revenue sources to the property tax and shared revenue. Further, state law has placed levy limits and has frozen shared revenue requiring us to rely far too heavily on the property tax. If shared revenue had increased at the rate of inflation since 2003, the City of Milwaukee would be receiving \$105.7 million more today and would not be facing these cuts. During this same period, state general purpose revenue increased by \$14 billion and the state budget increased by 60%.

The City of Milwaukee police budget is \$298 million. The police department budget alone is larger than our total property tax levy and has been since 2016. Obviously, this is not sustainable. Even though the Mayor's proposal cuts 60 officers, the 2020 police salary budget is actually \$7.3 million more than last year. Police costs are going up and our revenues are flat so we have no choice but to cut positions. The budgets of the police, fire and department of public works comprise 83.7% of the city budget. There is little room left for libraries, health, economic development, administration, elections and neighborhood services. These departments have already sustained significant cuts.

Truthfully, you as state representatives have more control over this situation than we do. You could choose to increase shared revenue at least to the rate of inflation, you could treat police and fire like all other city employees to rein in their wages and pension costs, you could share a portion of the growth in sales and income taxes generated with the local communities who spur the economic development, or you could allow us to diversify our revenue sources and have alternative sources of funding as most other states allow their major metropolitan city.

Let us assure you that our highest priority is the safety of our citizens. We need not be lectured about that—they are our neighbors and our neighborhoods. We agree that it is incumbent upon you to speak out but it is equally your responsibility to provide the resources necessary for the safety and security of our constituents. For too long our hands have been tied and you control the strings.

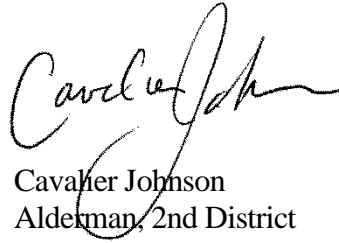
We are at a crossroads and this issue is too important to our community for finger pointing. Instead, if you are really willing to work together to find a solution, we welcome the opportunity. Our Intergovernmental Policy Manager, Brenda Wood, will be in contact with you to set up a meeting between us and to begin this long overdue discussion.

Thank you for your letter and your concern.

Sincerely,



Ashanti Hamilton
President, Milwaukee Common Council



Cavalier Johnson
Alderman, 2nd District



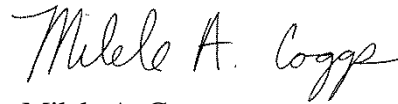
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