

TO: Town Manager Hoch

FROM: Williamstown Police Department Union and Non-Union members

DATE: 10/5/20

RE: Hostile Environment Toward Williamstown Police and Responsibility of Select Board and DIRE Committee

Since the creation of the town appointed DIRE committee many weeks ago, the environment of hostility in Williamstown toward our Police Department has worsened – with the department and its officers being the targets of unfair and false allegations.

This is an alarming trend that is not only damaging to Williamstown police officers and their families, but is simply not in the best interests of this community.

Our department is built on exceptional foundations of strong principle, service to the community and excellence in policing. The professionals who make up the Williamstown Police have served the community well for decades. Your own support of our department, Town Manager Hoch, has not gone unnoticed. And we recognize that you also are not immune to or untouched by these unfair attacks.

May I point out that there are no less than 16 other individuals who come to work every day and night 24/7 to protect and to serve the people of this great community. Yet while continuing to do this, the department has received ZERO support publicly from the Select Board. In fact, the Select Board has sat idly by and watched while a very small, one sided group has continued to tear away at every practice in our agency. For police officers, other public safety personnel, or any municipal employee – such a lack of support and blanket disregard by the executive body of this town is unacceptable.

Our initial job description as law enforcement officers has evolved significantly. It is an evolution that we have quietly accepted and progressed with even as certain members of the public - with no training or experience or understanding of best practices in policing - continue to tell us how we should do our jobs.

In a time where there is a shortage of willing and qualified persons to fulfill law enforcement careers, the Select Board's lack of support of our agency continues to make recruitment or retention of officer's nearly impossible. Not one member of the Board has stood up to acknowledge the good work done on a daily basis to keep this community safe. Day in and day out, responding to thousands and thousands of calls for service each year, dealing with problems, large and small. Seeing things that the public should not or could not see. Many of the residents/principals/business owners/other town employees privately support us, but for fear of experiencing backlash will not say anything publicly.

A small-but-loud, and damaging, chorus of voices are establishing a narrative in Williamstown that police should be mistrusted, disrespected and punished – simply for being police. And this poison rhetoric has had a chilling effect on the voices of a much larger group who support us.

It is for the above listed and other unstated reasons - that no town board or committee has bothered to consider - that we are alerting you to the hostile environment created by the DIRE committee and the Select board.

Public distrust of our agency is the highest it's ever been, by no fault of our department members. This creates a dangerous and unsafe working environment. The DIRE committee's rhetoric encourages the public to distrust the police. This is not the committee as it was initially proposed to bridge gaps and provide suggestions after speaking with all the involved parties across the town. This committee's sole focus is on the police department and never once has the police department been asked to the table.

All information requests from DIRE have been fulfilled forthwith, transparently and openly. We've provided numbers on arrests, traffic stops, policy, etc. NONE of these numbers have indicated any wrongdoing on the part of our officers, yet the attacks persist. Those of us in the department with children have experienced the harsh backlash of community members "knowing what their parents do" for work. How can you explain or justify this to our children?

There is an important public conversation happening in communities across the U.S. about the state of racial equality, social justice and the role of policing in being part of solutions to improve those conditions for people of color and all citizens. We value that conversation, have meaningful input to add and wish to be a part of it here in Williamstown.

But the work of the DIRE Committee to date, and the lack of leadership by the Select Board, suggests there is no place for us at the table.

Morale in the department is the lowest it has ever been, by no fault of our members. Much of this has been created, encouraged, and perpetuated by the hands of the town appointed DIRE committee with absolutely no evidence or data to support the committee's hostility toward law enforcement.

Our members are asking for IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION by the Select Board to not only address the hostile environment we are in, but to start to heal or fix the dissention caused by the DIRE committee and lack of Select Board support.

It was understood initially that the DIRE's mission was to be inclusion for all. But in fact, the only thing the police department has experienced as a result of the committee's work is exclusion, hostility and a disturbing sign that the Town of Williamstown no longer values its Police Department.

We ask for your for assistance and guidance.

Urgently,

President Brad Sacco

---

Representing the Williamstown Police Union (MCOP Local 424 AFL/CIO)

(This document and its beliefs are also supported by non-union and civilian members of the Williamstown Police Department)