



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **ACLU says Marshfield Police Chief's concerns should be evaluated on merit, not fear of lawsuits**

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Milwaukee--The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin, today, defended Marshfield Police Chief Joe Stroik for giving his opinion regarding staffing levels at the Wood County Dispatch Center. The Wood County Public Safety Committee has directed that a letter of censure be sent to Chief Stroik. The ACLU of Wisconsin believes that the Chief's opinion should be evaluated on the basis of professional standards and not its impact on the County's potential liability, as appears to be the case.

The Public Safety Committee's rationale for this censure, according to media accounts, is a concern that the Chief's comments might be used against the County, if the dispatch center is sued for causing harm to someone who was not able to get through to a dispatcher. "It is especially troubling that the Committee and corporation counsel apparently fear liability more than they fear Wood County residents suffering harm because of understaffed services," said ACLU of Wisconsin Executive Director Chris Ahmuty.

If plaintiffs' counsel, such as the ACLU, introduced statements such as Chief Stroik's in a civil rights case, the statements would still have to be evaluated for accuracy," said Laurence Dupuis the ACLU of Wisconsin's Legal Director. "On the other hand, if the Public Safety Committee tries to prevent the Marshfield Police Chief from pointing out what he believes are deficiencies in the dispatch service, it could be argued that the County is guilty of recklessness and therefore potentially liable for expensive punitive damages," Dupuis continued.

"The ACLU of Wisconsin believes that residents who have had their constitutional rights violated should have their day in court. It also believes that when a county's decisions are made on the basis of litigation strategy instead of professional standards, then the public is poorly served," concluded Ahmuty.

The ACLU of Wisconsin has 9,000 members in Wisconsin, including many in Wood County. It seeks to defend the civil liberties and rights of all Wisconsin residents.

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