



State Headquarters:
207 E. Buffalo Street, Suite 325
Milwaukee, WI 53202-5774
414-272-4032 / Fax 414-272-0182
www.ACLU-WI.org

June 10, 2020

Griselda Aldrete, Executive Director
Stephen DeVougas, Chair
Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission
200 E. Wells St. # 706A
Milwaukee WI 53202

Transmitted electronically only:

Griselda.Aldrete@milwaukee.gov
Steven.DeVougas@milwaukee.gov

Re: ***FPC Review of Police Chief Alfonso Morales***

Dear Director Aldrete and Chair DeVougas:

The ACLU of Wisconsin submits these comments regarding the upcoming review of Milwaukee Police Department Chief Alfonso Morales. We are responding in particular to the request of the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission for feedback on community relations. Unfortunately, we have very serious concerns.

In 2018, our clients in the case of *Collins v. Milwaukee* - the “Stop and Frisk” case - reached an important settlement with the City, which laid out a roadmap for protecting the constitutional rights of all the people served by the Milwaukee Police Department. We are very concerned that the Chief, who is ultimately responsible for ensuring MPD’s compliance with this settlement agreement, has put the community-engagement provisions of the agreement on a back burner. Especially in light of the killing of Joel Acevedo by an off-duty Milwaukee police officer, as well as the murder of Mr. Floyd by Minneapolis police officers, and the events that have followed, true and meaningful community engagement remains critical.

For example, the settlement requires MPD to issue a “Community Policing Status Report” twice a year, to inform the community how the MPD is engaging in community policing. The ACLU and City finalized this settlement in July 2018, nearly two years ago, but MPD has yet to issue any such report.

Similarly, the resolution creating the Milwaukee Community Collaborative Committee (CCC), also required by our agreement in order “to seek community input on police department operations to improve trust between law enforcement and city residents” apparently only passed in April and the CCC has yet to meet. Although it is the Common Council, not the MPD, that creates and passes resolutions, we have heard no mention from Chief Morales encouraging or advocating for the CCC. This indicates to us a clear reluctance to seek, much less emphasize, community feedback.

That this is the MPD's perspective is supported by the fact that the MPD's relatively new website, <https://mpdguardians.com/>, makes little to no mention of community policing, and does not appear to even mention either a Community Policing Status Report or the CCC.

Separately from the Collins agreement, we raise serious concerns about the fact that during the recent nationwide response to the murder of Mr. Floyd, Chief Morales has directed or allowed the MPD to use provocative and violent tactics against community members who are peacefully protesting police misconduct, and has minimized or disregarded community concern regarding these tactics. This is outrageous and unacceptable.

For example, MPD officers fired teargas and rubber bullets at protestors *before* any item was allegedly thrown at police, and another officer appears to have put his knee on the neck of a protestor. *See, e.g.*, Glauber & Wood, at [Protesters and police squared off in downtown Milwaukee, what happened](#), *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (June 3, 2020); Ashley Sears, at ['Get off his neck!' Controversial arrest caught on camera as MPD clashed with protesters](#), *Fox 6 News* (June 4, 2020). The ACLU of Wisconsin has compiled some [video clips showing heavy-handed, militarized MPD tactics against demonstrators](#).

Actions such as putting officers into riot gear or using tear gas often create and exacerbate, rather than deter, violence. *See, e.g.*, Koerth & Lartey, [De-escalation Keeps Protesters And Police Safer. Departments Respond With Force Anyway](#), [fivethirtyeight.com](#) (June 1, 2020). Yet Chief Morales does not appear to have considered or implemented such alternatives to using force against protestors.

Rather than acknowledging these legitimate community concerns or even acknowledging the need to change the culture within the MPD, Chief Morales has responded defensively. He has gone so far as to claim, more than once in a single speech, that Milwaukee police officers are being "crucified." *See*, [MPD chief compares officer safety to crucifixion of Jesus](#). This suggests a failure to consider the well known history of MPD violence against and killing of Black men in this city. It also evidences a lack of the kind of community engagement the Chief claims he wants to see.

The ultimate responsibility for these abuses of police power rests with Chief Morales. We urge the Fire and Police Commission to take its own responsibilities in overseeing the Chief with the utmost seriousness. The ACLU respectfully requests that the FPC consider and evaluate the Chief's actions and inactions in his interactions with the community, and ensure that these behaviors do not continue.

Sincerely,



Christopher Ott
Executive Director
ACLU of Wisconsin