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CHANTIA LEWIS
ALDERWOMAN, 9TH DISTRICT

Prevention over incarceration, always

Statement of Alderwoman Chantia Lewis May 2, 2017

Like some of our city residents, I too was the victim of an attempted armed carjacking (back in November 2016). It was an extremely traumatic and terrifying experience, and it is entirely by God's Grace that my situation didn't end tragically. The perpetrator opened my car door and pointed a gun to my head. Luckily he saw my children in the back, and decided against trying to drag me out and take the vehicle.

I have not publicly shared this experience before now – because of the pain and trauma that it caused – but I think the time is right as we discuss state legislation that is, in large part, in response to our rash of carjackings and car thefts.

Last month state lawmakers in Madison took action to stiffen penalties on those who commit carjackings.

For example, Assembly Bill 92 would create a specific felony of carjacking with fines of up to \$50,000 and prison sentences of up to 15 years. The proposal, which passed 9-3 at committee, also would increase penalties for repeatedly taking and driving a car to up to \$25,000 in fines or up to 12 years and six months in prison.

I firmly believe that this bill and others that have also been proposed -- meant to crack down on young and juvenile offenders -- are not going to make us safer in Milwaukee. They will result in us sending more of our young people to a place that is not structured or designed to produce outcomes that will make our community safer. At a cost of more than \$100,000 per kid, per year, this approach is not fiscally or morally sound or sustainable.

We need to focus our policy and financial resources on the front end to prevent crime and violence before it starts. The young people who attempted to rob me had been robbed of their future long before they approached my vehicle. We will fail them and ourselves again if we don't do the hard work of investing in a public health approach to violence prevention to stop the next wave of young people engaging in this dangerous and costly behavior.

Staff from the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) accompanied me to the court hearing for the young man charged in my situation. OVP and the Milwaukee Police Department's Office of Community Outreach and Education are working diligently with other city and county agencies to find solutions to reversing this deadly trend this summer and beyond. Intensive mentoring and case management has shown promise around the country in reducing recidivism rates. We can see change if there is early and consistent intervention at the first sign of risk.

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Page 2

The young man who put a gun in my face back in November deserves to be held accountable; but so do we. Accountability must involve ensuring that children and youth get the services and supports that they need to grow into mature adults with a healthy regard for life. If we continue to fail them as children, we will be paying for their mistakes a second time as adults.

Despite the horror of what happened to me back in November, I am 100% committed to prevention over incarceration.

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