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- Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee

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ALDERMAN, 12TH DISTRICT

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MEMBER

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- National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials
- National League of Cities
- Walker's Point Association
- Walker Square Neighborhood Association

Statement issued prior to tonight's Fire and Police Commission meeting

Alderman José G. Pérez
April 4, 2019

I want to take a moment to publicly thank Representative Marisabel Cabrera for her service to all the citizens of Milwaukee while a member of the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners.

As she now steps down from the Board, I do not want it forgotten that she performed a brave service under the administration of the previous Chief of Police, standing up against policies and practices that hindsight has clearly shown were ill-considered. In so doing, she was not only opposed by the Chief but by his enablers, notably Mayor Tom Barrett, whose part in the unfortunate ending to the Chief's tenure should not be forgotten. In working with her colleagues on the Board she earned the enmity of the Chief and the Mayor – as witnessed by his refusal to re-appoint her – but she offered hope to the community that the Board might actually be able to independently oversee the police and fire departments.

Her departure, however, comes at a very challenging time for the Board. It has been known for a while now that the executive director, Ms. La Keisha Butler, is soon to leave the City. Despite assurances to the contrary from the Department of Employee Relations offered three weeks ago that the administration would move quickly to find her replacement, this position was first posted as open earlier today. For my part, I will not accept any attempt to accelerate the hiring process for this position under an argument that it will "soon" be vacant. We cannot let a too-often-delayed recruitment process diminish the search for a candidate for an office of this importance.

Just last week, at a special meeting of the Board, public testimony was given that the Commission staff could prove unable to perform the City's portion of the work needed to fulfill the agreement entered into between the City and the American Civil Liberties Union. With Ms. Butler's departure and no evident successor at hand, who will assume responsibility for assuring that the City manages these critical obligations?

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Also, many in the community remain unsatisfied with the manner in which the administration of Mayor Barrett has chosen to fill the position of Homeland Security Director. Vacant for too many months, residents have now been offered a strange hybrid of Homeland Security Director and Emergency Communications Manager, likely to perform neither function well.

This difficult climate demands exceptional leadership. As the Mayor begins the process of filling all the vacant seats on the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners, I can only hope he will do everything he can to ensure the selection process is broad, deep, and inclusive. This seems the least he can do to improve a situation he has done so much to disorder.

If he will not work to assure citizens of independent oversight of public safety, we will.

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