



Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office
NEWS RELEASE

Sheriff Lucas Affirms Commitment to Restoring Honor, Integrity and Trust to Law Enforcement in Milwaukee County

Milwaukee, WI (July 3, 2020) My name is Earnell Lucas. On November 6, 2018, you – the people of Milwaukee County – entrusted me with the high honor of serving as our community's 65th sheriff. You entrusted me, too, with a prodigious task: restoring honor, integrity and trust to a once-proud organization that had lost its way. Over the past eighteen months, as my staff and I have worked to transform our organization, I have drawn daily on the lessons I have learned over 44 years in law enforcement and public safety. Some of these insights struck home on my first day on the job; others settled in over decades of lived experience.

But there is another lesson that weighs on me daily, one that I learned long before I put on a uniform and placed a badge over my heart. It is a lesson I learned not in the safety of the classroom but amid the uncertainty of a world governed too often by fear, loathing and prejudice: that I am a black man in Milwaukee and in America.

When I watch the video footage that has transfixed our nation depicting the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of four former Minneapolis police officers and the tragic killing of Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta, I am reminded of another stolen life: Daniel Bell, of Milwaukee. On February 2, 1958, Daniel Bell was pulled over by a Milwaukee police officer for a broken taillight, only a mile or so from the housing project where I was born later that year. The second Daniel stopped his car, he jumped out and ran.

Why did he run? Because in 1958, a black man in Milwaukee knew all too well what he might expect from those sworn to serve and protect him. And as Daniel ran for his life, unarmed, a pursuing officer drew his service weapon and shot him in the back. Then, as Daniel lay dying on the ground, the officer dropped a knife next to his body and, claiming self-defense, walked away a free man.

Our world and our community have changed immeasurably since 1958, and for the better. Black people are no longer met with brickbats when we cross the Sixteenth Street viaduct and redlining when we cross the city boundary. Our law enforcement organizations have grown in diversity and in compassion, and on a daily basis, courageous men and women in uniform perform lifesaving work throughout our community.

But the Milwaukee where I grew up – the Milwaukee where Daniel Bell was shot in the back, the Milwaukee that introduced me to law enforcement when my twelve-year-old self “matched the description” of a thief who had stolen a white woman’s purse – still exists for far too many of our young people. It exists just as surely and just as painfully for young black and brown Milwaukeeans as George Floyd’s Minneapolis or Rayshard Brooks’ Atlanta. It exists, at least in part, because we in law enforcement have failed to close the breach, widened over so many decades of oppression, between our organizations and the community that we are entrusted to serve.

I joined the Milwaukee Police Department as an eighteen-year-old recruit because I wanted to repair this breach. I entered law enforcement because I saw the awesome authority that an officer exerts on others’ lives, and I wanted to harness that power for the betterment of the community that nurtured me. And I am serving as your Sheriff today because I am committed to confronting and correcting the injustices that hold us back from achieving true equality in our community.

Since taking office in January 2019, my staff and I have taken decisive action to restructure the operations of the Sheriff’s Office, to align our organizational values with the demands of our community, and to root out racism and all forms of institutional prejudice from the mechanics of Milwaukee County law enforcement. In this critical moment, it is my hope to share the progress that we have made, and to affirm our commitment to building upon these sweeping reforms as we infuse our efforts with the “fierce urgency of now.”

Affirming Human Rights and Dignity in the Milwaukee County Jail

Among my foremost responsibilities as Sheriff are the welfare and safety of all individuals detained in the Milwaukee County Jail. For too long, the jail was synonymous with dysfunction and the ill-treatment of vulnerable residents. Within the past eighteen months, we have worked successfully to restore the jail to compliance with medical and correctional standards for safe and efficient correctional operations.

- In early 2019, the Sheriff’s Office worked with other Milwaukee County stakeholders to transition medical care in the jail to a new healthcare provider, which has attained full staffing and provide a high quality of care to those in our custody.
- Working with the jail medical provider, the Sheriff’s Office replaced inmate wellness checks conducted by law enforcement officers with high-frequency medical checks performed by trained nursing staff.
- During 2019 and 2020, the Sheriff’s Office has stabilized staffing levels in the jail, by ensuring that the correctional workforce is appropriately compensated, trained, and supported. The use of mandatory overtime has decreased, ensuring appropriate rest and relief for personnel working in a dynamic environment.

- The Sheriff's Office has worked to ensure a safe environment for all individuals working or detained in the jail. Since 2019, assaults in the jail – by in-custody persons on fellow in-custody persons and by in-custody persons on correctional officers – have decreased.
- The Sheriff's Office worked aggressively to preempt COVID-19 transmission within the jail, successfully implementing containment and isolation protocols setting aside separate housing for COVID-19-positive and quarantined individuals. The Sheriff's Office also worked successfully to establish an off-site alternate medical facility for the treatment of in-custody individuals afflicted with COVID-19.
- The Sheriff's Office has strongly supported countywide decarceration efforts, which have resulted in significant decreases in Milwaukee County's jail population.

Regulating the Use of Force by Sheriff's Office Personnel

Our community expects that law enforcement and correctional officers restrict their use of physical force to those occasions when force is necessary for the protection of life and safety. Since taking office, my staff and I have strengthened the processes governing the use of force by Sheriff's Office personnel.

- In 2019 and 2020, the Sheriff's Office has reexamined its use-of-force reporting practices and restructured the use-of-force review process to maximize the involvement of subject-matter experts, internal investigators, and senior-level command staff.
- The Sheriff's Office has utilized its advanced business intelligence systems to track uses of force, enabling early warnings related to personnel who may be likely to use unjustified or inordinate force, and timely intervention.
- The Sheriff's Office has invested in de-escalation training, including crisis-intervention training conducted by community partners. The Sheriff's Office has implemented innovative strategies to defuse tense encounters between law enforcement and persons experiencing crisis. These efforts include partnering with Milwaukee County's Housing Division to connect homeless individuals experiencing crisis with vital resources.

Investing in Compliance and Professional Performance

When my administration entered office in January 2019, we encountered an organization whose systems of policies, procedures and compliance measures had atrophied through lack of proper oversight. On my first day in office, I ordered the restructuring of all regulatory compliance functions, as well as our Internal Affairs Division, Training Academy, and Public Records Unit, into an Office of Legal Affairs and Compliance. Led by an experienced legal practitioner with extensive qualifications as counsel to Milwaukee County law enforcement and public safety entities, the Office of Legal Affairs and Compliance is tasked with ensuring compliance with all legal and ethical standards and measures of professional performance.

- The Office of Legal Affairs and Compliance is effectuating the overhaul of all Sheriff's Office policies and procedures, aligning agency practices with national standards, through a partnership with the nationally-recognized training and policy programs of Lexipol LLC.

- The Internal Affairs Division diligently investigates allegations of work-rule violations and potential misconduct committed by Sheriff's Office members.
- The Training Academy, which not only equips newly-recruited correctional officers and deputy sheriffs with professional skills but provides ongoing training and recertification to personnel, has emphasized programming that fosters trust between law enforcement and the communities we serve. Specialized implicit-bias and cultural competence training is provided to all deputy sheriff recruits as a component of the Training Academy's core curriculum.

Transforming How We Connect with Those We Serve

As we work to restore trust in law enforcement, it is essential that those of us who wear the badge communicate honestly and transparently with those whom we serve. It is equally important that our trust-building efforts extend beyond the bare minimums, and into the critical realm of direct, sustained, and open-minded engagement with community members invested in building a strong and safe Milwaukee County. When I entered office, we created an Office of Public Affairs and Community Engagement to centralize the outreach and communications functions of the Sheriff's Office.

- The Office of Public Affairs and Community Engagement has revolutionized our agency's recruitment process, leveraging print, broadcast and social media to connect with community members with skills and life experiences that are needed, but often underrepresented, in law enforcement. These efforts have resulted in a workforce – extending from our correctional and deputy sheriff ranks to our civilian and security staff – that better reflects the diversity and values of our community.
- The Office of Public Affairs and Community Engagement has opened new avenues of communication between community members and Sheriff's Office leadership and front-line personnel. These initiatives extend from informal community activities, including Public Safety Days in Milwaukee County's parks and "Coffee with a Deputy" gatherings, to mission-focused community dialogues focused on immigrant rights, voting rights, the rights of members of Transgender-Intersex-Gender-Non-Binary communities, and the intersection between public health and public safety.
- The Sheriff's Office has worked to create new methods of communication that protect resident privacy while maximizing accessibility. For example, the Sheriff's Office maintains a mobile application, available on iOS and Android operating systems, which allows community members to interact with a broad variety of Sheriff's Office resources. Anonymous crime tips, requests for Internal Affairs investigations, crash reports, and contact information for Sheriff's Office divisions are among the resources accessible to the public through the MCSO Mobile App.

Employing Community-Driven Policing Strategies

My administration and I recognize that the needs expressed by our community must determine the strategies and tactics that we employ when providing law enforcement services in our neighborhoods. Our Patrol Division, Parks Patrol Unit and Community Relations Unit, the

subdivisions of the Sheriff's Office most directly engaged in neighborhood policing, embrace philosophies of community-driven and intelligence-led policing.

- The Sheriff's Office works proactively with residents, community activists, business owners, nonprofit employees, and public-sector stakeholders to identify challenges developing in neighborhood parks. In 2019, large-scale collaborations between the Sheriff's Office and coalitions of community stakeholders resulted in successful interventions in Moody Park, Garden Homes Park, and Kosciuszko Park, where residents and neighborhood advocates had experienced high concentrations of public safety challenges.
- In partnership with the Milwaukee County Parks Department and nonprofit service providers, the Sheriff's Office employs innovative strategies, including crime prevention through environmental design, structured engagement with park users, and (when appropriate under public health guidelines) direct neighborhood outreach to build systems of collaboration supporting public safety in individual parks.
- The Sheriff's Office leverages its investigative units to respond to high-acuity public safety challenges identified by our community-based partners. These challenges include human trafficking, narcotics distribution, the trafficking and sale of firearms, and other networks of violent crime. Sheriff's Office-led investigations routinely and successfully interrupt violent criminal enterprises jeopardizing the lives and safety of Milwaukee County residents, holding high-level offenders accountable for their actions.

Advancing into an Era of Change

For the past eighteen months, we – as a Sheriff's Office and as a community – have worked successfully to improve the performance and accountability of Milwaukee County's oldest law enforcement agency. But we cannot and must not claim victory. No one Sheriff can transform the discourse and practices of an entire profession overnight. Nor can one law enforcement agency, despite the best efforts of the over 600 public servants who strive day-in and day-out to advance the cause of justice within the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office. Instead, we must unite as a community dedicated not only to discussing transformative change, but also to enacting it.

We must explore every facet of our criminal justice system, seeking efficiencies that make the halls of justice accessible to everyone in our community. We must scrutinize every aspect of our public health, social services, and education infrastructure, and invest in these systems the resources that they require. And we must also reflect upon our own actions, as individuals living in a community that, for all our efforts toward progress, continues to experience systemic inequality.

But we must not stop there. For those of us serving in the law enforcement profession, our commitment to continuing the work of reform and transformation requires greater urgency and more definite results than ever before. For no matter how far we have come, we have not come so far that Black and Brown people in our country and community can enter an encounter with law enforcement without fear or apprehension.

The manifold tragedies of 2020, from the murders of George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks to the systemic inequities laid bare by the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have demonstrated that our nation has a long road to travel before we can claim victory in our quest for equality. As a Black man in Milwaukee and as your Milwaukee County Sheriff, I know that our community has an equally long road to travel. But I am confident that, with the passionate advocacy of the present movement reinforcing our commitment to equity and justice, we at the Sheriff's Office will continue to advance the cause of law enforcement that honors and affirms our community's trust.

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