

Mayor Gaylor Baird's news conference remarks included the following:

To say we are living in unprecedented and challenging times is an understatement. In addition to navigating the pandemic of COVID-19 that surfaced last year, we now are being called upon urgently to confront and address the long-standing pandemic of racism and inequality in our society.

Over the past several weeks, I've heard from many people in our community, including young people involved in peaceful protests, business executives, African-American faith leaders, other elected officials, local university professors and administrators, our police officers, Lincoln Public School scholars, diversity and inclusion professionals, national experts in community-police relations, and concerned residents. I've heard from people with different stories, perspectives, and experiences of life in Lincoln, and I've heard from people with vastly different viewpoints and opinions. I'm struck by the courage displayed by many of our residents and public servants to be vulnerable in the face of those with whom they disagree. To humanize in the face of de-humanization. It's so difficult to do that. It's much easier to preach to the choir than it is to bridge across traditional divides, and it is much easier to hold one story or narrative than it is to hold multiple stories or narratives at the same time.

I approach this moment with humility, recognizing that I have much to learn and un-learn and many stories to hear and understand. I also recognize that I do not have all the answers and that I am only part of the solutions, since we all have a part to play in creating a more just and inclusive society.

In that spirit, there are two stories I want to address briefly today. First, I will touch on the story of our Lincoln Police Department and some of the positive work our officers have done in our community to build good relationships. Then, I will touch on the story of persistent, systemic racism in our community, which has contributed to a culture in which many of our residents do not feel safe and included here in Lincoln.

Our City's community policing model prioritizes developing relationships and building trust between law enforcement and the residents they serve. Our officers live, work, raise their children, and enjoy our city as residents first. While they have a special responsibility as law enforcement professionals to serve and protect the well-being of others, they approach this responsibility as a collaboration with their fellow residents.

- Part of our officers' duties, for example, include regularly attending neighborhood association meetings to understand concerns across our city. In the last 12 months alone, even with the impacts of COVID-19 on City operations, our police officers spent almost 1,000 hours participating in community events and making presentations to community members, reaching an estimated 26,000 people in Lincoln.
- Of note, LPD organizes a local chapter of a national summer program called Marathon Kids to promote fitness and fun activities based out of the F Street Rec Center. It is our understanding that we are the only police department run chapter in the country to have gained sponsorship by NIKE.
- In addition, LPD's 5 geographic teams enable officers who comprise them to become more grounded in the community, getting to know apartment managers, residents, and children who play at local rec centers. I vividly recall a ride-along I went on with an officer on the Center Team who could greet community members on "O" Street by name.
- From 'Pop with a Cop' to 'Heroes and Helpers' to high school career fairs to participating in fundraisers for Voices of Hope, which provides crisis support for victims of domestic violence, our police officers are engaging in community events every day and not asking for credit or recognition. In this manner, they support and benefit the community in ways that are often not visible to the broader public, but are deeply felt by those directly impacted.

Beyond these events and special collaborations, the Lincoln Police Department partners extensively with organizations throughout the community, recognizing that our officers are called upon to respond to residents with a wide variety of needs and that the police have a significant role to play in keeping people *out* of the criminal justice system. LPD's REAL program, a decades-long partnership with the Mental Health Association of Nebraska, has enabled LPD to refer over a thousand individuals for mental health services, reducing crisis calls and the number of our community members taken into emergency protective custody or jail. Then there's Project RESTORE, a collaborative program that successfully diverts 11-17 year-olds from entering the justice system by instead providing appropriate social service interventions and referrals. Lancaster County Human Services Department Director Sara Hoyle and Chief of Lincoln Police Jeff Bliemeister have been invited to speak at national conferences about this program, which is recognized as a national model.

These efforts and many others made on a daily basis by LPD are a big part of why our officers proudly put on a uniform, and why, as mayor, I am proud of the work they do to fulfill their oath to serve and protect.

But this is not the only story to be told. There is another story – one rooted in hundreds of years of Black people in America being seen and treated as less than human, in policing and beyond – that is crying out to be heard, acknowledged, and acted upon. In my conversations with Black residents and other community members of color, I have heard clearly that they do not experience life in our city in the same ways that our white residents do. Often they do not feel safe, and they do not feel free from the exhausting anxiety that accompanies a life lived in constant concern for one's own security and that of loved ones. I have heard how they look at that horrifying video of George Floyd's last breaths and see the potential for that to be their brother, their father, their son, or themselves. In recent days, I have heard countless references to “the talk” that Black parents have with their children, a talk that robs their children of precious and defining qualities of childhood – innocence, joy, optimism, trust. And while our Lincoln police have worked to form deep relationships with so many in our community, these feelings of distrust still persist.

Many of these feelings of distrust are rooted in experiences of police surveillance that our black community members do not see happening to white community members with the same frequency, or even at all. I recently heard from a Black pastor who, while driving his minivan, noticed in his rear view mirror that a police officer was running his plates, despite the fact that he was not speeding and his vehicle had no visible problems. I also heard from a black undergraduate about the time he was walking home from class at dusk and was approached and asked where he was headed, not once but twice, by two different police officers. The numerous stories and lived experiences of people such as this local pastor and student do not align with the statistics showing that Lincoln is not as bad as other cities in terms of racial discrimination, or with the “Nebraska Nice” culture that we often like to tout.

How difficult it is to listen to these two stories and hold them both at once, to try to reconcile what feel like competing narratives. In these profoundly polarized times, how easy it can be to instead “pick a side.” Yet what I encourage our community to do is to resist the idea that there are sides to be taken. We are being called upon to acknowledge and address uncomfortable and painful truths about what it means to be Black in America. This is not the time to “pick a side” but rather to form a circle. One that brings people with different life experiences together, to see and hear their truths, and to find ways to co-create solutions to the problems being illuminated.

If this sounds improbable or even impossible, then let me relay another story I have watched unfold in recent weeks. As I sat in the grass at a peaceful protest listening to young leaders call for change, a high school student named Alexandre took hold of the megaphone and told the crowd how Lincoln could be the model for the rest of the country of how we move forward to a better, more just future. Then last week

at LPD headquarters as I was having a discussion with officers at the beginning of their shift, I listened to an officer named Max sitting at a table in the back of the room raise his hand and then say the exact same thing. In the midst of the anguish that both Alexandre and Max feel right now and for vastly different reasons, their capacity to envision our community emerge from this pivotal moment as an example for the rest of the nation to follow gives me hope. We must build on that vision, and we must do it in concert with one another.

We must work toward realizing the vision of a community where people of every race and every story feel a sense of true belonging. Everyone has a part to play in this work. We create transformed, inclusive new realities by becoming transformed, inclusive people. This is about the resident as well as the public servant, the private as well as the public sector. It means me, it means our government and our police department, and it means you. It means cultural change as well as policy and institutional change. It means both *doing* better and *being* better.

One area in which our Lincoln police department continually strives to do and be better is in the area of use of force or use of control. Each year, our police department conducts a review of its use-of-force policy. This year, in response to community member concerns and in the spirit of continuous improvement, our police department has undertaken a mid-year, expedited review of the current use-of-force policy. This review has already been informed by hundreds and hundreds of emails the City has received from constituents calling for specific changes to our use-of-force policy.

It is also being informed by the Citizen Police Advisory Board. The Citizen Police Advisory Board is a seven-member body made up of Lincoln residents appointed by the Mayor and first established in 1976. The board reviews complaints regarding police procedures and policies and makes recommendations to the Mayor, City Council, and Chief of Police based on their findings. On June 30th, LPD will share with the public its proposed revisions to General Order 1510, which is the police department's use-of-force policy. The revisions will include a codification of sound de-escalation strategies, practices intended to minimize the use of deadly force and the use of neck restraints, more comprehensive reporting, and a more robust duty to intervene.

At that point, the public will have an opportunity to provide comment on the proposed revisions. In July, at a date that will be set by the board tomorrow, the Citizen Police Advisory Board will review the proposed revisions to General Order 1510 along with public feedback. The CPAB will then draft a report with final recommendations. The process for providing public comment on the proposed revisions will be announced on June 30th.

LPD embraces this opportunity to clarify and strengthen their policies in order to build deeper trust with our community. LPD wants to be a part of the solution that ensures that everyone in our community feels safe and secure in the knowledge that Lincoln is a place where people are firmly committed to building a more just and equitable world that recognizes the full humanity and dignity of every individual.

We are committed to moving in the direction of the world that Alexandre and Max envisioned, one built on true justice, love, and peace.