From:	Steve Allison-Bunnell
To:	Grp. City Council and City Web Site; Mayor Staff; PD WEB Mail
Subject:	True police reform begins with re-humanizing police officers
Date:	Saturday, June 27, 2020 8:50:41 AM

Dear Members of the Missoula City Council, Mayor Engen, and Chief White,

My name is Steven Allison-Bunnell, and I have been a resident of Ward 3 for 23 years.

I am writing to express my outrage and anguish over the murder of George Floyd and the too-long list of his Black brothers and sisters at the hands of police officers across the country. I am also writing to offer my thanks for your public pledges to help Missoula be a safe place for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and for beginning the listening process in good faith and all sincerity.

Listening it a critical first step, but it does not take lengthy study to acknowledge that the deep systemic change necessary to make good on this promise requires a profound shift of culture and resources. More funding for additional training and revisions to the existing policy manual are not enough. Change must begin with how prospective officers are first screened, trained, and equipped, and ripple across the entire criminal justice system to nurture respect, service, and true accountability to all citizens.

The lack of charges against the self-appointed white vigilantes who unlawfully assaulted, and detained the Black Lives Matter protester, and deprived him of his civil rights, is unacceptable and betrays a firm commitment to racial equity.

City government and police department leadership can say all officers are directed to act on community policing principles. But the projection of militarized authority by heavily-armed and armored officers negates those principles. While the school resource officers have offered a more human face and, according to my Hellgate graduate, demonstrated what it means to be connected, engaged peace officers, I cannot say that most patrol officers visible around the city or at public events are as approachable. Even from my vantage point of middle class, male, white privilege, I find most MPD officers in their mirrored sunglasses, combat boots, black gloves, and personal arsenal intimidating and frightening. It is clear that this image is intentional.

In addition, the casual psychological intimidation exercised by some MPD officers betrays a deep lack of basic respect and attitude of service. A personal experience underscores how deeply this runs precisely because of the trivial circumstances: After 9/11 we were pulled over on a brightly-moonlit snowy night because we had failed to turn our headlights on when we left a friend's house. The officer did not cite my wife, but before letting us go referenced our "No Iraq War" bumper sticker by asking her, "Have you been sending money to Al Queda?" This inappropriate and threatening question that made it clear to us that he was doing us a favor by not citing us, and that if we did anything to displease him, he could throw the book at us. Amplify this officer's entitlement to casually bully us with the dynamics of pervasive implicit bias, and the risk to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in our community is unacceptably great.

Because law enforcement is a local matter, the power to create meaningful change in the Missoula Police Department rests with you.

I have not included the email promoted by the Defund the Police movement, but I am in full support of its demand that true change is required, and that budgets and funding embody principles and policies.

Thank you for your time and for your service to Missoula.

Sincerely,
Steve Allison-Bunnell
418 Woodford, Missoula