

Minneapolis leaders need to get behind Police Chief Medaria Arradondo

To not support him is to risk losing him and, consequently, throwing the Minneapolis Police Department into disarray.

By Gregory Scott Hestness | SEPTEMBER 19, 2019 — 5:28PM

It's the best of times, worst of times to be a Minneapolis police officer.

It's the best of times because line-of-duty deaths are at historic lows. Compensation reflects a professional level, benefits are generous, including an increasingly rare livable pension. The work is meaningful and rewarding.

And Chief Medaria Arradondo is a 30-year veteran, whip-smart, of great character, and a native Minneapolitan (South Side, Minneapolis Central, I might add). The community, elected officials and the union support him. I certainly do.

It is also the worst of times, however, because intense scrutiny and a presumption of misconduct is soul-wrenching for police officers. There have been horrendous acts of misconduct and poor judgment locally and nationally. Irrespective of the fact that these are anomalies, every officer owns the conduct of every other officer among activists and segments of the media.

I was shocked to hear that some members of the Lyndale Neighborhood Association (LNA) did not want their inspector to attend an LNA meeting in uniform. I was the Fifth Precinct inspector from 1992 to 1994. Lyndale was not then the desirable neighborhood it is today. Crack sales and the attendant violence, including murder, had neighbors scared.

LNA was one of my very best partners. They responded by coming together with programs like Lyndale Walkers, housing strategies and a strong partnership with the Fifth Precinct. These are the reasons Lyndale is a solid, diverse neighborhood today.

It is also the worst of times because there is a growing belief among some cops that they are primarily "law enforcement." When I started with MPD in 1975, we were told that about 15% of what officers do is the enforcement of laws. Recent studies show still that only 10% to 20% of patrol officers' time is spent on the enforcement of laws. Police spend their time keeping the peace, looking for lost children, guiding visitors, intervening in mental health crises, connecting needy citizens to assistance, directing traffic, sorting out motor vehicle accidents, etc.

Recently, our good chief has come before the mayor and City Council asking that he be permitted to strategically grow the department. Council response was tepid at best.

MPD needs to grow, first and foremost, to save lives in north Minneapolis. As well, Minneapolis' population is growing significantly for the first time since the 1930s. It includes new immigrants, but also young professionals — including the hard-to-retain young professionals of color — those relocating for business and empty nesters leaving their suburban homes to live near our amenities. They will be adding to the 85% of non-law-enforcement police services the public expects and pays for.

Adding police officers is pointless if they are not wisely used. Chief Arradondo knows that, and I trust him to invest them innovatively and efficiently. Every progressive chief wants a department that "reflects the community." When I started, the five African-American officers in my recruit class doubled the number of black officers on a force of 824 sworn. Without hiring opportunities, the chief can't make an impact.

This endorsement comes from a retired taxpayer who just absorbed another double-digit property tax increase. It comes from a retired deputy chief who was called upon to respond in the mid-1990s to the New York Times' assertion that 100 murders in a year



BRIAN PETERSON • BRIAN.PETERSON@STARTRIBUNE.COM

In his annual budget address, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey proposed adding 14 new police officers, far fewer than what Police Chief

made us “Murderapolis.”

MPD hiring had been constrained for years, until the force had become incapable of adequate response. We hired and trained 110 “Clinton cops,” in one year. That was a strain for the entire department. But combined with new tactics, including community partnerships, we all turned the tide to make our city much safer. Crime fell nationally, but it fell more in cities with progressive police departments.

I recommend we learn from history and never let that happen again.

If our loyal, committed and talented chief sees no chance of accomplishing his vision, he may have to consider what other cities have to say when they come knocking on his door, as they will (if they haven’t already).

I can do the math (I was MPD budget chief for four years). Four hundred officers, plus facilities, supervision, vehicles and equipment, is unrealistic. Nevertheless, Mayor Jacob Frey, Council President Lisa Bender, Vice President Andrea Jenkins and all City Council members:

Let’s find a way to support this chief. My 40 years of police service and lifetime in this community tell me he is our best chance to be a safe, inclusive and respectful city.

Greg Hestness is a retired deputy chief of the Minneapolis Police Department and former University of Minnesota police chief.
