

**Mayor John Engen Statement on Public Safety and Justice
April 20, 2021**

The murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer was tragic, appalling and part of a pattern of violence and racism inflicted on black and brown people by police in cities large and small around the country. My hope is that justice, however delayed and partial, has been done in the case of the officer who killed Mr. Floyd.

Here in Missoula, we know that our residents have real concern about police violence everywhere. I also believe that having a well-trained, professional police force maintaining public safety is critical to the quality of life of all our residents. I also know that when vulnerable people see cops in other places engaged in violence against people of color and minority residents, it's easy to assume that all police departments and officers are bad actors.

That's not the case in Missoula because we are intentional in how we hire, train and manage our peace officers. And, because of these assaults on vulnerable populations and the community's need for officers who are trusted and trained and in the business of helping, not hurting, residents, we continue to evolve as we reimagine public safety.

Chief Jaeson White and his team, with my encouragement and support, have re-tooled schedules to ensure that we have more officers on the street at the right times to assist the folks we serve by responding to calls, watching for serious criminal activity, building relationships in neighborhoods and commercial districts, keeping our streets, parks and trails and other public spaces safe.

That new schedule also allows us to do comprehensive training for all officers in de-escalation (the practice of making potentially violent situations safe and reasonable), crisis intervention (recognizing that a person in crisis needs attention that's different from the way we respond to criminal activity) and much more. Each month, all of our officers receive at least 10 hours of professional training to ensure that our community is safe, that we use force only when no alternative exists, that we respond appropriately based on the call for help and that we deliver that help professionally.

In addition, each of our officers is subject to an extensive background check, physical and psychological testing and interviews that go a long way in weeding out unprofessional, sometimes dangerous, applicants from ever joining the force. And, because of our strong field training program, officers who did get hired but aren't performing in the field don't continue with our agency.

November 19, 2019
Page 2

Where practical and appropriate, we've made investments in alternative responses to crisis calls that don't pose a threat of physical harm, and that program is giving officers some relief in crisis management.

My goal, and that of Chief White and all our officers, is to maintain the trust of our community, to help people in need, to prevent violent crimes and protect lives and property, to build strong relationships with our residents and to continue to make Missoula a safe, welcoming community for all of her residents, regardless of skin color, gender identity, economics or religion.

We're not perfect, nor will we ever be, but I believe the Missoula Police Department's values are consistent with those of most Missoula residents, who expect a professional, well-trained response to public-safety issues. We'll never stop striving to be the best partner we can be in keeping the peace.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Engen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail.

John Engen
Mayor