



## Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Deputies' Association

October 11, 2020

### For Immediate Release

Dear Citizens of Kalamazoo County  
and the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners,

On behalf of the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Deputies' Association (KCSDA) and its members that proudly serve the citizens of this county, we respectfully request that you accept this letter as our formal notification that the KCSDA membership has overwhelmingly approved a Vote of No Confidence in Kalamazoo County Sheriff Richard C. Fuller III. Last week, over 90% of the voting KCSDA membership approved this measure.

This measure came with great hesitation, and only after much discussion and consternation. We hesitate because we consider ourselves a team of dedicated individuals and it goes against our natures to draw public attention to the problems within our agency. We also hesitate because we fully believe that if this letter does not have the desired effect, the current administration will most certainly respond with retaliation, whether overt or subtle. We may ultimately pay a high price for doing what we know in our hearts is the right thing for the County of Kalamazoo, its citizens, and the selfless employees that work to keep our community safe.

Over the past several years, we have been disheartened by the actions and inactions of Sheriff Fuller. He has tested our willpower and confidence in his skill to adequately lead this agency. Under his leadership, moral has plummeted to depths never before seen at this agency. Under his leadership, new and veteran employees alike are leaving at rates never before experienced by this agency.

According to KCSDA records: From 2012-2020, Sheriff Fuller has hired 195 new employees, 114 union members have resigned, 11 were terminated, and 31 have retired. These numbers do not include members that were promoted to or retired from the Sergeant's or Command Officers' Associations. Sheriff Fuller is fully aware of his recruitment and retention problem, but chooses to do nothing to remedy it. Most of those who have resigned, including several highly skilled deputies, have left due to low pay and/or the unacceptable working conditions created by Sheriff Fuller and his administration.

After a lengthy and expensive legal process, the KCSDA recently won yet another wrongful termination case involving a member who was terminated by Sheriff Fuller for no other reason than due to political pressure. (MERC Case # 19G-497-GA)

Prior to Sheriff Fuller taking office, the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's office had a vibrant culture that encompassed teamwork, leadership, professionalism, and integrity. Those cultural elements resulted in a work environment that promoted organizational and individual success. Promotions were based on merit instead of popularity. At that time, our agency was well respected in the region and across the state. Deputies were happy to come to work and the culture was that of a positive and fulfilling place to work. Many deputies came to the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office from outside agencies specifically because of our reputation for being one of the best law enforcement agencies.

Sheriff Fuller has destroyed the positive culture within our organization and has developed a culture that can only be described as hostile and negative. Sheriff Fuller has demonstrated that his only concern is that of his public image.

**Causes of the Vote of No Confidence:**

In the subsequent lines of this letter we will identify brief examples of Sheriff Fuller's lack of leadership, lack of communication, lack of support and caring for his employees, lack of financial accountability, and his questionable integrity.

The Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office is a ship without a rudder. Staffing in the jail has reached critical levels. With the decline of Covid-19 cases, the jail population is steadily climbing, wings are opened up again, and there are not enough people to staff all of the wings. Command staff has been permitted to blatantly retaliate against staff members for attempting to address their safety concerns. Sheriff Fuller has demonstrated a disdain for his employees and seems to only take action that is politically motivated. His refusal to address multiple employee safety concerns has placed at risk the health and welfare of the deputies and inmates.

On numerous occasions, the KCSDA has brought to Sheriff Fuller information regarding employee issues, yet he routinely exhibits ignorance as his defense or refuses to meet with us altogether. This has forced us to file a record number of grievances that ultimately end in arbitration; a process that ends up costing the taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars that could most assuredly be put to better use.

Earlier this year, Sheriff Fuller was again publicly called upon to answer for his mismanagement of funds. He was nearly half a million dollars over budget. He blamed it on "Inmate medical expenses" which was later proven to be very inaccurate. His remedy to his mismanagement of funds is to cut positions or attempt to reduce employee compensation to make up the difference.

In response to public criticism over his excessive spending, Sheriff Fuller's response was to implement a policy of not authorizing overtime in the jail. When an employee got sick or was

injured, the jail was being forced to operate while severely understaffed. Recently, an incident occurred in the jail requiring the transport of inmates to a medical facility. This left the jail with less than half of the staff level normally required to manage the jail.

However, the sheriff authorized two Detective Sergeants to go to a citizen's home because this citizen called him a name on social media.

Recently, the Sheriff asked the County Board of Commissioners for \$825,133 over a five-year period for new Tasers and body cameras. Sheriff Fuller stated that he was going to help pay for it by eliminating a deputy's position. This level of disloyalty to his employees is why the members of the KCSDA have been without a contract since the end of 2018.

The KCSDA has made requests, *ad nauseam*, to have discussions about settling a new contract and addressing employee issues. Our requests have been mostly ignored. His employees need a leader, a spokesperson, to speak out publicly on issues that are affecting the efficient operation of the agency and the valid concerns of the officers on the front line. If he cannot be that leader, then the KCSDA will fill the void and vacuum that we perceive has been created – and seek a new sheriff.

The foregoing examples represent a fraction of the issues that the KCSDA has with the leadership of Sheriff Fuller. We maintain serious questions about his commitment to our department and the law enforcement professionals that work for it, and we have become convinced that he places his personal interests above all other considerations.

In closing, please know that we are not disgruntled employees. We are public servants who have given our hearts and souls to the citizens of Kalamazoo County, and who regularly risk their own safety to provide for the safety of our community. Due to the serious nature of our concerns and our sense of duty to the citizens of Kalamazoo County, we felt compelled to take this difficult vote and submit this letter. Our sole interest is to safeguard this community and the officers that serve it, and to protect our ability to provide our neighbors with the services that they deserve and have every right to expect.

Respectfully,  
Alan Miller, President



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