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Open Letter to Mayor John Cooper

August 8, 2020

No police department or police chief is ever perfect; some Departments function well where others routinely struggle and falter. What distinguishes a *good* and/or *well-functioning* Department from a *bad* and/or *poorly-functioning* Department is the willingness of *leadership* to put the **public's** and the **employee's needs and safety first!** It is no secret that during the past several years the Metro Nashville Police Department (MNPD) has not done a great job protecting and serving the public and/or their own employees. In fact, some of the highly publicized failures by MNPD recently led to the creation of a diverse coalition of organizations banding together to demand that action be taken to address issues ranging from sexual assault/sexual harassment to racism, to low retention rates.

The sheer number of reports by current and former employees paints a very damning picture of a department in freefall swirling in turmoil and riddled with flagrant and rampant Human Rights Violations and criminal activity! Since April of this year, 33 current and former MNPD employees have stepped forward to report that they have been experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment, racial and gender discrimination, intimidation and retaliation (when reporting these illegal and outrageous behaviors) while working for MNPD. Prior to those individuals coming forward to share their stories of their attacks and victimization, 2 former officer's filed lawsuits against the Department. One suit was filed earlier this year for sexual harassment and the other was filed by a female officer in 2018 after being raped by a fellow officer! All of these victims also reported their complaints were either ignored completely, or the investigation focused on them instead of the perpetrators. The one exception is the September 3rd arrest of an MNPD officer indicted for rape and sexual battery. So what is the difference between the 33 and the indicted officer? The victim was not a fellow officer who broke the code of silence.

The ongoing issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment, the reports of racial, gender, and other discrimination, and other issues has led to an increase in *officer* resignations. In fact, since 2012 resignations have increased from approximately 20 per year to approximately 50 per year! It is impossible to ignore the large and ever increasing volume of problems occurring in the Department and it is equally impossible to ignore and dismiss the deeply troubling nature of those problems. Mr. Mayor, we implore you to address these issues (and any other issues that arise) so that this Department can move forward and fully fulfill its duty to the citizens and visitors to our community.

This is why a diverse coalition of organizations and individuals are asking you to commit to a process that will provide the best opportunity for the department to address the disturbing trends contributing to an unsafe culture for women and minorities. We greatly appreciate you starting this process by having your staff engage in meaningful dialogue with us and other community partners, as well as creating the "Policing Policy Commission." These initial steps show your willingness to take whatever action is needed to uphold your oath of office. Ensuring the safety of MNPD employees and the community you both serve is no small matter. You indicated in your letter (dated August 14, 2020) announcing the creation of the Policing Policy Agency, that the commission would review and answer some very important questions that you and the public have. Some of the questions and issues you directed the Commission to answer included (but was not limited to the following):

- Reviewing the services offered to officers and their families.
- Reviewing the "complaint process" and assessing how well the process that supervisors use to review "use of force" incidents and allegations operates.
- Evaluating how well the MNPD interacts with Metro Nashville Community Oversight Department (MNCO) when it comes to investigating complaints they receive against members of the Department.
- Comparing and Evaluating how well MNPD policies and procedures match up with national best practices (including practices recommended by the U.S. Department of Justice in police department consent decree,

Furthermore, in an effort to ensure the "*complete and total dismantling*" of what can only be described as a "*deeply ingrained systematically supported utterly dangerous toxic culture,*" and follow "best practices," we ask that you have the department adopt the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) *Addressing Sexual Misconduct by Law Enforcement* or the Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women *Model Policy Resource: Law Enforcement Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Accountability* policy. To better help serve and protect the community, we suggest you have the department provide trauma informed



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response training such as the *IACP Successful Trauma Informed Victim Interviewing* to not only incoming recruits, but to veteran officers and supervisors as well.

None of these steps will be effective however if top level supervisors (Captain/Commander/Deputy Chief) who either actively participated in the growth of this culture, or at least condoned it through inaction and silence, are allowed to remain. The same holds true for the Office of Professional Accountability and Human Resources. To achieve desperately needed change is to commit to a fair and impartial hiring process. This is why, for the past three week, Silent No Longer TN has made intensive efforts to obtain clarification from you and your staff regarding the hiring process for the next MNPD Police Chief. We very much appreciate the responses we have received, however there is still some confusion. For instance: in the statement you released known as the "Police Chief Roadmap" you said that ***"In August, Metro Human Resources (HR) will assemble a review committee of diverse individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement and community oversight to assist the department as it scores and rates applicants for the Chief of Police position, in accordance with Nashville Civil Service Guidelines."*** However, later in the statement you say that ***"Metro HR scores candidates and meets with the review committee narrowing the field to the top finalists for interviews."*** After several attempts to get clarification on the inconsistencies in your announcement, we received a response from Deputy Mayor Phillips and Mr. John Buntin (the search liaison for MNPD Chief). Instead of their responses bringing more insight into the process their responses just added to our confusion. That's because once again, we received **"inconsistent"** responses from both men. Mr. Phillips stated the ***"review committee will review each applicant and narrow down the number to be submitted to an interview committee. HR does not make any selections... nor does it rank the candidates."*** However, Mr. Buntin said: ***"Metro HR staff score the candidates into four categories" and "the review committee will then work with Metro HR staff to narrow the field to a group of finalists."*** Mr. Buntin also stated ***"We can't announce members before Metro HR has finalized choices or reached out to people to confirm their availability."***

At no point did Silent No Longer TN or any member of the coalition request specifics on who would be on the review committee or hiring panel. What was asked (on several occasions) was for you to ***"commit to bringing in qualified law enforcement professionals from outside the state to review and interview prospective candidates"***. Another request was for you to confirm your willingness to listen to the community by including "community advocates from the Black and LatinX community. We feel this is vitally important for the search committee to include individuals who work directly with individuals who work with community members on a daily basis. And as we mentioned before, we also believe the search and hiring committee should include an advocate representing the MNPD ***victims, sexual violence survivors*** (in general), and a member of the ***Community Oversight Board***. We must admit, we are deeply concerned we have not received "direct" and "clear" clarification to questions posed to you and your staff regarding the role or HR staff and review committee members, or received any assurances you will follow best practices to ensure a fair and impartial review committee and hiring panel.

We believe the public has a right to know the answers to these questions as well. Therefore we are seeking a **written and publicly** announced guarantee from you that these policies will be implemented. We are also requesting, in writing, your personal guarantee that you will direct the termination of any senior level member that allowed this culture to flourish with the MNPD. Taking this bold and necessary step sends a very clear message that sexual abuse, rape, racism, sexism, gender bias, homophobia, etc. **WILL NOT BE TOLERATED** any longer at MNPD. It will also show your commitment to city employees, the community and to the next Police Chief that you fully support the creation of a safer and more fair culture within MNPD, and throughout the city of Nashville. Furthermore, it allows you to solidify your legacy by taking yet another step toward creating a 21st Century Police Department you and the residents of Nashville can be proud of.



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Law enforcement officers cannot properly protect the community they serve when they cannot trust their fellow officers. The culture which the leadership of the department has allowed to grow cannot remain. Therefore we call on Mayor Cooper to implement best practice policies and honor the voices of Nashvillians who desire a transparent and impartial hiring process where law enforcement and community advocates have equal voice. As a coalition of individuals, groups and organizations, it is our collective desire to see comprehensive changes in the Metro Nashville Police Department.

Therefore, we hereby add our signatures and sponsorship to this letter in support of the ideas contained within:

Silent No Longer TN	Rev. Judy Thompson	Jim Osborn	Ann Kelly
Women's March Tennessee	Rev. James R. Bingham-UMC	Betty Sumerlin	Bonita Harrison
Power Together Tennessee	Rev. Linda Jenkins	Jennifer Watson	Alison Valentine
Tennessee Anti-Racist Network	Rev. Matthew Davis - UCC	Darlene Leong Neal	Joseph Galante
Stop the Hate Coalition of Tennessee	Rev. Amanda Lewis - UMC	Adam Hammond	Mathew Lemond
Release the Children	Rev. Anita Jacobs - UMC	Geoffry Martin	Andre Greer
Dream Networkers	Fr. James P. O'Connor	Linda Martin	Lynn Greer
Sexual Assault Support Coalition	Rev. Michael Sheldon	Lynn Leshner	Debbie Lynn
Women of Music Action Network Nashville	Sr. Beth Mayer	Linnea Tweedy	Norda Alampay Aguila
Power of Our Voice	Chelsea Crowell	Cathy Clinton	Kimberly Tromatore
Feminist Empowerment Action Network	Frances Schultz	Johnny Doerge	Lori Rochelle Coleman
Tennesseans For Moral Leadership	Timothy Coil	Anne Elizabeth Baugh	Nathanial Guyer
S.V.S. Collective	Baylee Johnson	Emily Furman	Angela Gimlin
Enough Is Enough Tennessee	Greta McClain	Bethany Clement	Tasha Valentine
Indivisible Nashville	Candace Richards	Franklin Lamont Clendening	Casandra Mason
Indivisible Tennessee	Sherry Ward	Mary Ann Jones	Stephanie Hamilton
Women of Faith Mid TN	G. Garcia	Laura Weeman	Rita Buckanan
CCRJ Alliance	Rachael Summers	Stephanie Hamilton	D.J. Howard
SV Peer Support Group Mid TN	Kathy Halbrooks	Allison Hammond	Khalil Numan
	Doreen Stewart	Aftyn Behn	Allison Rizzo
	Lisa Rock	Kristina Counts	Amanda McCloud
	Erin McDermott	Matt Goetz	Sara Scott
	Barbara Walker	Haylie Stoltz	Jeffery Ross
	Maurice Jackson	Sherondia Sullivan	Helen Davidson
	Quintina Jackson	Katrina Larsen	Rhea Swift
	Pamela Sanders	Marcus George	Yvonne Masters
	Adrian Zimmerman	Devin Green	
	Melvin Smith	Brenda Harrison	