

**Remarks by Councilmember Tim Burgess, Seattle City Council
National Association of Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement
National Conference, Seattle, Washington**

September 20, 2010

My colleagues on the City Council and I welcome you to Seattle. We are delighted you chose our great city . . . the home of the WNBA champion Seattle Storm.

Over the next several days you will discuss, debate, and learn about the best ways and means to provide civilian oversight of police practices and behavior.

All of us know from our own experience, that this is an important topic because . . .

- Our police officers deserve to know that they have the support, trust and confidence of the people they serve and the best way to build that trust and confidence is by doing good, effective police work and by practicing transparency and inviting robust civilian oversight.
- Likewise, the residents of our cities deserve to know that their police officers are well trained and well supervised and that they will conduct themselves in a professional and fair manner with every stop, with every individual, in every neighborhood, every time.

I've been on both sides of this issue, as a Seattle police officer and detective in the 1970s (I recognize that experience is ancient history!) and as a Seattle resident. Now as a City Councilmember and Chair of the Public Safety Committee, I am even more acutely aware of how vitally important it is to be able to trust our systems of police accountability.

What I've come to realize is that police agencies that enjoy the most trust and confidence of their communities are those that are proactively transparent. . . they are the police agencies who on their own reach out to the community and invite dialogue, scrutiny and review. They don't wait for others to impose these conditions; they lead the way themselves.

I was very proud of our police department just recently when the Chief of Police announced that he was inviting two other major city departments to conduct a peer review of our own investigation of an officer-involved shooting that resulted in a death. This peer review will assess the quality of our internal investigation before the case file is sent to the prosecuting attorney to make absolutely certain the internal review was thorough, complete and unassailable. This is the kind of proactive transparency we should expect from our police agencies.

Inviting this outside peer review was a powerful statement to our own detectives . . . we trust your work, the department has nothing to fear, nothing to hide, and it welcomes others assessing its actions and its work.

It's also a powerful statement by our police department that it is fully accountable and responsible to the city and to every Seattle resident.

One last thought.

This work never ends. We won't wake up one day and determine that our police are perfect or that we've done everything possible to ensure the openness and quality oversight we desire.

This work never ends because what we are dealing with here are powerful mandates—the exercise of state authority, the power to detain and arrest, and legally sanctioned use of force.

In enforcing the law and keeping the peace, these mandates sometimes come up against what Americans identify as our personal freedoms as defined in the Constitution by our wise Founders. The right to free expression, free assembly, privacy, the right to be safe and secure in our homes, the right *not* to be stopped or searched by the government or its agents.

And then there is the history of how these mandates and rights have been confused, distorted and even violated. In the middle of this tension, and often at times of risk and danger, we place our police officers and expect them to do their work without error. But errors will occur.

The work of our police is demanding and difficult. Our expectations of our police are indeed extremely high, and rightfully so. Over time, our police seek to improve their own performance, and those engaged in civilian oversight seek to help them do so. Your being here this week is testament to that commitment.

You have a great agenda of workshops and plenary sessions this week. I look forward to participating in these sessions with you.

Let's use these days together to advance the good work of our police officers. Let's advance the good work of the dedicated professionals and citizen volunteers who care about the rights guaranteed by our Constitution, who care about building trust and confidence in our police through robust, proactive transparency and civilian oversight.

Thank you.