



CITY OF FALLS CHURCH

An Open Letter to the City of Falls Church from Police Chief Mary Gavin

To the members of the Falls Church community:

I am profoundly sorry and saddened by the senseless death of Mr. George Floyd.

Again, as a nation, we are confronted with a horrific event where we witnessed the murder of an African American male, George Floyd, at the hands of a police officer. This incident is one of many that has outraged communities across this nation and creates deep personal wounds, especially for our minority communities.

Personally, I am outraged and sickened by what we all have witnessed and the damaging effects this has on our society as a whole. This incident was not a training error or a policy mistake; it was an intentional and barbaric act by a police officer only to be reinforced by additional officers on the scene who chose not to intervene and ensure the safety of Mr. Floyd, as he begged for his life.

Each and every one of these atrocities amplifies the pain felt in our minority communities. When public servants fail us by abusing the authority invested in them by the community they have sworn to protect and serve, it destroys trust and partnerships, the fabric of our community.

I want to repeat: the authority of a police officer is the community's authority, not any individual officer's alone.

There is nothing more sacred in police work than the trust of the community in which we serve. Every police officer swears to uphold the Constitution of the United States, and our First Amendment guarantees all Americans to the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press to report, and the right for people to peaceably assemble. These are legally protected actions in our Commonwealth and Country. I denounce any actions made by police officers to actively impede the rights of journalists or people protesting peacefully. We in law enforcement must always strive to protect the rights of civil discourse in our nation as it is the vehicle of change.

At every police officer's swearing-in at the City of Falls Church, we introduce them to the City of Falls Church community's values and reinforce that the authority invested in them is that of the community's. I intentionally repeat to the newly sworn police officer and remind tenured Officers present that the community of Falls Church beholds all authority. Police authority is to be used with respect and restraint with all people, in all circumstances. In our police department, we have gone as far as to take the words

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“citizen” and “resident” out of our policies and nomenclature to reinforce equality for all people.

In creating a healthy and nurturing culture within the police department, we intentionally hire people from diverse backgrounds and ensure inclusivity with our policies and practices. We are not without fault and mistakes, but it is our responsibility to be responsive, identify issues, investigate, and take corrective action. For officers or employees that egregiously violate policy or the rights of others, they are relieved of duty and dismissed from the police department. We should act and be seen as neighbors, friends, and family to the community we serve.

As the chief of police, I could list the hours of training for the use of force or equipment provided to ensure the safety of all involved in arrests. However, the issues we have before us are more profound beyond any one single police department. As a profession, we must confront our cultural problems with community dialog, training, policy, and leadership of police organizations. We must make every effort to change this profession by challenging our fundamental mission of public safety. The enforcement of laws is only a small percentage of the actions we take daily. Public safety should and must be our primary focus.

There is a need for structural change within our profession. Simply firing bad actors when they abuse or exploit their role as public guardians are mere cosmetic solutions to a deeper problem. It's up to the leaders within our profession to call for this systemic change and be ready to embrace change in whatever form it takes and lead by example to all officers within our ranks.

In my own discussions within the City of Falls Church Police Department, our officers have expressed a desire to engage the community and create dialog for real change. On behalf of these officers and the department, we denounce the actions we have witnessed and want to listen, hear, understand, and act on our community's concerns so that we may ensure justice and peace.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Gavin', written in a cursive style.

Mary Gavin
Chief of Police
City of Falls Church