

Alderwoman Lewis: Standing tall when it counts

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I am pleased for our citizens that the Fire and Police Commission stood tall last evening and took important actions related to the Milwaukee Police Department.

Commission members expressed outrage with the recent change in the department's standard operating procedure (VIII C, SOP 130) related to foreign nationals, which was executed without a hearing or any communication with the Commission. The change - brought to light by faith group and immigration rights advocates — eliminated a directive that officers were not to question any person about his or her immigration status unless the person met a narrow list of criteria.

A separate change stated that officers "shall inform" federal immigration officials of the whereabouts or behaviors of any "suspected illegal immigrant" when that person is arrested for a felony or other serious crimes, such as those involving terrorism or street gangs.

The MPD announced an about face last night, with Assistant Chief James Harpole telling the Commission that it would immediately alter or strip away the change and allow for officers to use discretion where needed.

The reversal is welcome news to many Milwaukee families who have been worried and living in heightened fear that they might be stopped or questioned about their status and that they might be separated without notice from loved ones.

Secondly, the Commission ordered Chief Flynn to submit a revised vehicle pursuit

policy by July 27, this after months of study and public testimony about police pursuits and how the policy may be emboldening young would-be robbery suspects and those taking part in vehicle thefts and car-jackings.

The Commission has a critical oversight responsibility when it comes to public safety in Milwaukee and I am glad to see it taking a stronger stand in demanding transparency and accountability.