

Milwaukee Ald. Donovan: Eliminating community prosecutors very, very bad for Milwaukee

Posted on Monday, Jul 24, 2017

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Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan

Sadly, the bad news just seems to keep coming for Milwaukee's challenged neighborhoods.

It was confirmed in a conversation I had last week with District Attorney John Chisholm that several of the Community Prosecutors working hand-in-hand with Milwaukee Police have been cut and will soon be eliminated. Additionally, he told me that the Community Prosecutors who had been working in MPD Districts Three, Five and Seven are already gone - reassigned to other matters. These are arguably the three most challenged police districts in the city.

I'm further told the prosecutors assigned to Districts One, Two and Four will soon follow.

The Community Prosecutors and the Community Prosecution Unit are very near and dear to me.

I remember when the program was started in the early 2000s as a pilot program with then prosecutor Derek Mosley (now the Presiding Judge in Municipal Court) setting up shop in MPD District 5 and almost immediately effecting change and showing results. At that point I knew we needed to expand it and bring Community Prosecutors to the south side.

I worked with then Police Chief Art Jones, then District Attorney E. Michael McCann and then Council President Marvin Pratt (along with then Mayor John Norquist) to pull it off, and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding was identified to expand the program to the south side in District Six.

Over the years because of their success the effort expanded across the city. Prosecutors worked very closely with residents and MPD officers on nuisance properties (drug houses, gang hangouts, prostitution dens, etc.). The prosecutors made a huge difference – putting wayward landlords on notice, triggering fines and citations — and taking them to court if the criminal activity continued. I cheered the results and residents and business owners also welcomed the reduction in nuisance problems and improved quality of life.

The mere presence of the Community Prosecutors (assistant DAs) at MPD district stations was a huge benefit, in part because of the knowledge they possessed about the specific problems and challenges in the district's neighborhoods and for the great advice they could share with officers about the intricacies of the law, and what can or cannot be done. I might add this model has won national awards and is being copied by other cities!

And now that presence and that team approach will soon be completely gone from some of our most challenged areas – areas that cannot afford to lose that intensive and personal approach that only a prosecutor can bring.

I am saddened by this development but I understand that we have budgetary challenges across all units of government. That said, I stand committed to helping find funding in the future to fund Community Prosecutors.

They are that important!