

MPPOA: On declaration of no confidence

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An overwhelming majority of the membership of the Madison Professional Police Officers' Association (MPPOA) has approved a declaration of no confidence in the leadership of Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway. This was a resolute vote, with over 95% of the Association's voting membership returning a vote of "no confidence."

The MPPOA did not make this decision easily or in haste. Instead, our vote of no confidence is the culmination of many months of frustration in the absence of effective leadership from the Mayor. On March 25, 2019 we proudly announced our endorsement of Satya Rhodes-Conway for Mayor after she committed herself to developing a strong partnership with our labor organization. After several meetings and ongoing communication with the then mayoral candidate, it was our belief that Satya Rhodes-Conway could bring people together and lead Madison into the future. We hoped to work in concert with Mayor Rhodes-Conway to reduce disparities in our community and prioritize the safety of Madison's residents and visitors. At that time, the Mayor stated, "A safe city is the underpinning of a place where everyone has the chance to pursue opportunity and thrive." It has become clear that Mayor Rhodes-Conway misled us when she was running for office. Collectively, we are uncertain of her ability to move us forward for the betterment of our police department and our city.

During her mayoral candidacy Rhodes-Conway stated that she looked forward to cooperation with our membership; working together when we faced challenges and celebrating our accomplishments as our employer. Throughout the Mayor's tenure, she has demonstrated an unfamiliarity with her police department. She has been quick to point out, sometimes inaccurately, where we fall short, while the successes achieved daily by members of our organization go unrecognized. This unhealthy portrayal of the Madison Police Department perpetuates an "us versus them"

dichotomy in our community. It is particularly dangerous at a time when city agencies and entities should be working collaboratively to address an increase in burglaries, car thefts, weapons offenses (including shots being fired daily all over the city) and, sadly, attempted and completed homicides too often claiming the lives of young Madisonians. We would never ask the Mayor to ignore our inadequacies. In fact, we call for a leader who is committed to rolling up her sleeves, diving in, and working with us on systematic improvements rather than separating herself from us and further dividing our community.

Mayoral candidate Rhodes-Conway expressed a commitment to worker's rights and collective bargaining. We looked forward to an ongoing dialogue between our labor organization, the Mayor's office, and interested community stakeholders. Instead we must pursue the Mayor for communication opportunities. Those discussions devolve into her desires for potential furloughs, the re-opening of settled contracts, and other budgetary matters at the expense of collaborating on strategies to ensure a safe Madison for everyone.

Because of these issues, the MPPOA issued an open letter to the Mayor and asked for a conference to discuss moving forward. During this meeting, we asked Mayor Rhodes-Conway to facilitate and foster opportunities for our organization to meet with community groups and members who are open to constructive dialogue toward social justice and positive change. Rather than stepping up to this leadership responsibility, the Mayor told us she "struggles" with that role and asked us, instead, to use our own voice, effectively declining our request for community engagement. Only after this conference did the MPPOA Board decide to conduct a vote of no confidence. The decision to take the vote is not merely a reflection of her failure to support the Madison Police Department. It is reflective of her failure to lead the city.

The Madison Professional Police Officers' Association remains dedicated to the safety and well-being of everyone who lives, works in, and visits Madison. We recognize that we can enhance our already high quality of service through continuous improvement efforts. We are a national leader in law enforcement and we are motivated to work together with community stakeholders who are open to honest, constructive, and collaborative conversations that lead to systemic improvements for the betterment of everyone in the Madison community.

Mayor Rhodes-Conway did offer us one piece of sound advice: We will do a better job of using our voices to highlight the work our members do day in and out as law

enforcement professionals, advocates, and allies. We will foster a better relationship between police and public, with the hope of knowing one another better. We will not stand for false narratives that only serve to divide us. We are here to serve Madison, and we will continue to do so to the best of our abilities.