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John my Committee's
Statement on Current
Police ~~crises~~

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We speak as interested and very concerned citizens to the currently serious problem of relationships in Detroit between the Police Department and the community it serves.

While our views are expressed as those of individuals, most of us are organizationally active and have some perception of sentiments and attitudes in wider circles. All of us, in endorsing this statement, share the common goal of restoring a sense of balance and perspective to our public discussion of this troubling problem.

In point of historical fact, our observations will add nothing new to the dimensions of this discussion. To a large measure, we are reiterating that which has been said before in various reports, comments, analyses and editorial opinions. It is appropriate at this time, however, to give our views public expression, because many who would otherwise speak in similar terms feel themselves intimidated or their voices unheard among the strident tones of those representing the extremes of the issue.

There is, therefore, another voice yet to be heard. We believe it to be the voice of the overwhelming number of residents of the Detroit area who want nothing more than to enjoy peaceful neighborhoods, safe streets, and the opportunity to raise their families in a secure environment. It is self evident that this will not be achieved by the demagogery of the extremists or by the posturing of opportunists; nor will it be achieved by a systematic dismantling of the Police Department; nor by the mindless response of individual officers to admittedly difficult situations.

The time is perhaps once more upon us to repeat that which is elementary. It may be regarded as axiomatic that effective police work has its roots in effective cooperation with the community. When police and citizens meet, participate, understand, and become real partners, it is the community, and the safety of its people, that will be the winner.

We are persuaded that in individual instances, members of the Detroit Police Department have been guilty of excessive conduct, of abuse, intimidation, harassment and invasion of privacy. We are similarly persuaded that the role of the peace officer is made vastly more difficult by all too prevalent attitudes of suspicion, mistrust, contempt and by refusal to cooperate. Regrettably, each of these sets of attitudes and patterns of behavior is complementary, one to the other. Each feeds upon the other. Unchecked and uncontrolled, they will inevitably lead us to confrontation rather than to resolution.

The shouting, the criticisms and counter criticisms, the demands and the refutations, do not substitute for the hard thinking and the harder work involved in the cementing of police-community relations. We pledge our own efforts, and whatever influence we have among our respective groups, to the engendering of the respect properly due those who enforce the laws which protect us all, and to the police calling as a profession. We see the home, the school, our congregations of worship, our organizations, as among those institutions which must take this responsibility seriously.

We urge upon the police that which is so desperately wanted by so many: vigorous, speedy, honest and color blind law enforcement. The assurance must be firm that citizen complaints will be handled within a procedure that is clearly understood by and has the confidence of the public; that complaints will be investigated thoroughly, and acted upon immediately with accurate public disclosure. Non-police personnel, drawn from institutional and individual sources, and available on an around the clock basis, may be useful in certain crisis intervention situations. We suggest the employment of this resource as a routine of regular police practice.

Our statement is made in full confidence that the administration of this city, and the leaders of our Police Department, desire and will strive for nothing less than a highly professional service to the people of Detroit. Given this quality of service, given this degree of competence, there can be no question of citizen support, financial and otherwise, of the police of our city.

The process we visualize and the task ahead of us are not unilateral ones. Neither can be successful with only the Police Department or only the community taking action. They must be authentically cooperative. It is to this objective that we must address ourselves. The value at stake could very well be that of the harmony and unity of our city; the alternative could be an unbearable one.

As concerned citizens, we offer every assistance possible to us to bring together those who are aggrieved with those in authority who can act upon their grievances. It is only through the effort to achieve greater understanding that we may hope to achieve the greater stability of our city.