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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Finance Committee Creates All-Hands-On-Deck Approach to Public Safety

*Additional Police Officers Will Be One Part of Comprehensive Strategy
Throughout All City Departments*

Last November the Common Council approved a 2014 budget that included three police classes, and these new recruits have allowed the city to maintain an average sworn strength level of 1,868 officers.

As part of his proposed 2015 Executive Budget, the Mayor has proposed increasing the size of the last 2014 police class from 35 to 50 officers. This December addition of 15 officers (plus one proposed mid-2015 class of 35) would push next year's average sworn strength from 1,868 to 1,880. In other words, while nearly every other city budget is reducing employees, our largest department – the police – would actually be increasing. For comparison sake, the fire department had one class in 2014 of just 11 new sworn personnel.

Rather than approve this request for increased funding, the Finance and Personnel Committee has instead decided to hold the line on increased taxes for increased police officers. Amendment 18B, sponsored by Aldermen Hamilton, Kovac, and Wade, passed the committee last Friday on a 3-2 vote.

“I voted for 73 new police officers,” said **Committee Chairman Nik Kovac**, “but not for 85 new officers. Those additional 12 officers will create a long-term annual incremental cost of over one million dollars a year. I couldn't look taxpayers in the eye and tell them to pay more money for more officers, especially when I know there are other options for reducing crime and improving safety.”

-More-

New approach/ADD ONE

“Just look at the data,” commented **Alderman Willie Wade**. “Since 2008 we have had fewer officers every year than the year before. And crime has gone down in those years according to the Police Chief. So how can we spend money on a variable that doesn’t even correlate with our goal?”

Instead of approving the Mayor’s plan to spend more money on more cops, the Finance and Personnel Committee took a more holistic view of what causes – and thus what prevents – crime.

Amendment 16A, sponsored by **Alderman Ashanti Hamilton**, passed on a 4-1 vote. That budgetary change increases summer job opportunities for unemployed adults, funds Promise Zones in our highest crime neighborhoods on the north and south sides, and creates rapid crisis response teams composed of trauma-informed specialists who will be housed in the Police Districts which have the highest rates of violent crime.

“Focusing on the root causes of crime should – dollar for dollar – have a more efficient and far-reaching impact than just continuing to spend more money the way we have been spending it,” said Alderman Hamilton. “The people in my district know firsthand how traumatizing violence can be, especially for young children. Too often, the same children who see the violence one year commit it the next year. We need to get in the middle of that cycle and change the expectations on our streets.”

Amendment 27A, sponsored by Aldermen Stamper and Bauman, passed on a 5-0 vote. It assigns additional building inspectors specifically into buildings that house the most criminals. It is based on interior inspection zones already in existence on the East Side and in Lindsay Heights.

“The problem of violence in this city is too deep for just the police to combat,” said **Alderman Russell W. Stamper, II**. “It is essential that every city employee – along with the community – attacks this issue.”

“From my personal experience,” said **Alderman Robert J. Bauman**, “it can be just a few notorious buildings that drag an entire hard-working neighborhood down into chaos and confusion. This amendment gives us control over the actual causes of fear, crime, and disorder.”

Alderwoman Milele A. Coggs, a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee, said the Council’s public safety discussion is overdue. “Public safety is a primary concern of mine, and my focus during our discussions about the police department budget has been on exploring alternative strategies to address crime,” she said.

“Additional employment opportunities, trauma informed care for child witnesses of violent crime, and reducing the number of vacant homes in our neighborhoods (because they attract criminal activities) – these are some of the ways we can combat the root causes of crime,” Alderwoman Coggs said.

The full Council will vote on all three of these amendments tomorrow (Friday, November 7, 2014) beginning at 9 a.m. in the third floor Council Chamber at City Hall, 200 E. Wells St.