



## **A Letter to the Aurora Community from Chief Kristen Ziman**



When I first became a police cadet in 1991, I had my sights set on a career in law enforcement because I wanted to make a difference in my community. I joined my hometown police department and made it my mission to change the way police and the community interact. The Aurora Police Department was a very different place back then, and it seemed that many officers had a "mirrored sunglasses look and attitude" vibe about them. I decided early in my career that I didn't want to be that kind of cop, so I watched how the good officers interacted with our citizens. Those who were great communicators and showed compassion seemed to create better outcomes — even when enforcing the law. It's been my mission to change the culture of policing not just here at APD, but nationwide.

I believed that we were making progress at APD, but over the past two weeks, many have painted our profession with the same broad brush. The murder of George Floyd at the hands of four police officers is inexcusable, and I'm disgusted by it, but that is not reflective of all police officers.

We aren't perfect as a department, but I truly believe my department is different. The majority of our police officers understand that treating people with human dignity and respect is the cornerstone of our values. That is why we have such a big focus on community-based policing that consists of listening to our citizens and working alongside our neighbors.

APD has made huge strides over the past 30 years to hold our own accountable. Since I joined the department as a cadet, we've completely revamped the way we hold our own accountable and created the Office of Professional Standards. Their mission is to investigate supervisor and citizen initiated complaints of missteps or wrongdoing by our officers. The Office of Professional Standards gathers facts and conducts a thorough investigation. The findings are then passed to the Bureau Commander, where discipline is recommended. It doesn't stop there. The entire investigation and disposition are passed onto APD's Employee Review Board, who independently looks at the entire case and makes a recommendation for discipline before it is passed to me for final review and administering of discipline. We believe that the function of discipline is to change behavior so we follow a progressive model. However, I have terminated officers during my administration for egregious actions that are not consistent with principled policing.

Law enforcement as a whole has failed our black and brown brothers and sisters, and it shouldn't have. As a leader in the law enforcement community, I am sorry for injustices and pain that some in our profession have caused individuals and their families nationwide.

Right now is a pivotal moment in our history. APD's policy and procedures already follow the guidelines set in The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. In addition, we practice concepts of procedural justice that ensures the actions by our officers are proportional, legal, authorized, necessary and ethical.



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But we can do better. Our profession can do better.

At APD, we are committing to the following improvements:

**Transparency:** Our Office of Professional Standards process has always been transparent through the Illinois' Freedom of Information Act, but we're making it easier to get a inside look. APD and the City's Information Technology Division have been working on a public portal for people to see complaints against officers and the outcome of the investigation. We expect to release the portal publicly in the next week or two.

**Citizen Review Board:** Every time I speak in the community, I invite people to utilize FOIA when they inquire about our internal investigations. I am open to exploring a citizen review board because we have nothing to hide. In fact, the majority of our complaints are supervisor generated and that speaks to the fact that we police ourselves. If a citizen review board assists in building trust and transparency, I support it.

**Body Cameras:** This week, APD started the process of procuring body cameras for every officer on the force. Currently, every patrol vehicle has dash cameras and the department will add body cameras to increase transparency and accountability for our officers.

**Listening Sessions:** We can't do this alone. We need the community's input to help us create change. APD is setting up community listening sessions and ways for you to reach out so we can hear firsthand from our neighbors about what we can be better to interact with you. We've also set up a dedicated email address [SpeakToUs@apd.aurora.il.us](mailto:SpeakToUs@apd.aurora.il.us) where you can share your thoughts, concerns and ideas.

Change doesn't happen overnight, but as a community we can come together to promote and embrace systemic reforms. We need to enact change together and I need everyone's help.

I am making a commitment to my community that I am here for you. I am here to listen. I am here to make policing better. I am here to make #AuroraStonger.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristen Ziman".