

Friday, Feb. 24, 2023

Sheriff Fletcher
Ramsey County Sheriff's Office
425 Grove St.
Saint Paul, MN 55101

Dear Sheriff Fletcher,

On Tuesday, Feb. 21, you publicly released an unapologetic, fearmongering and factually inaccurate letter directed to the attention of four of our seven board members. This letter was your response to the budgetary discussion and corresponding actions the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners took earlier that day to address your office's repeated and unauthorized overspending. Instead of attending the public meeting, a meeting to which you were invited to attend on numerous occasions, and participating in a collaborative, direct and transparent conversation for the public to observe via live broadcast, you chose to instead send your letter that excluded Commissioners Moran, Ortega and Xiong.

To state the obvious, the commissioners you addressed your letter to identify as white, and the commissioners whom you left out identify as Black, Latino and Hmong. This is not a small omission on multiple levels. As a long-time elected official who frequently postures for, expects and receives respect due to your positional title, you should fully recognize the disrespect you displayed by excluding members of this county board.

This act to exclude a subset of commissioners is a serious breach of protocol on its own terms. However, when one evaluates who you addressed and who you omitted, the issue becomes far more serious and concerning. Attempting to engage on countywide issues with white commissioners, while intentionally omitting commissioners of color from that discussion, is a racist act that deserves public attention and condemnation.

As a long-time elected official in Ramsey County, there is no excuse for you to not understand why each of the commissioners you excluded plays an important role in the issues you purportedly want to address. Commissioner Ortega serves as the Chair of the Safety and Justice Service Team Committee which oversees county board discussions of topics that include public safety and community well-being. These are topics that you claim to want to seriously discuss with the board, and yet you omitted him from your letter. Commissioner Moran is the Vice Chair of the Budget Committee which oversees the deliberative work that prioritizes the county resources that you claim to want to seriously discuss with the board, and yet you omitted her from your letter. Commissioner Xiong represents the area in which the tragic act of violence at Harding High School recently occurred. She leads Ramsey County's representation at multiple, collaborative tables focused on community safety, and she has recently spent countless evenings and weekends supporting and grieving alongside family and community who have lost loved ones to violence. Yet you claim no one has shown up but you, and you omitted her from your letter.

Your record of not respecting nor engaging with Ramsey County's leaders of color, and all leaders for that matter, goes well beyond the release of your recent letter. This is just the moment where we have chosen to publicly point out your repeated behavior that harms our work as an organization. For years, you have had a reserved seat at numerous multi-disciplinary tables that have been built to collaborate and address issues around community safety and well-being. You have remained conspicuously absent from those discussions. Just in the last few months, you repeatedly ignored Public Health leaders when they highlighted concerns directly to you about inmate care in your jail, and you refused to engage personally with Corrections leaders as they attempted to help you deal with the need to depopulate the jail due to Department of Corrections sanctions. Your pattern of behavior is harmful to the work that we are here to do as a system of interdependent partners, and it is generally unacceptable.

Ramsey County is the most diverse community in Minnesota with the most diverse county board, leadership team and overall staff composition in the state. In your leadership role you are expected to respect every individual at every level of this organization. We are all here to work together to serve the community no matter our title. As elected officials, the public expects us to set the example. How you treat your fellow elected officials and leadership models how residents can expect to be treated when in the care of your office.

Your letter mentions the pain and fear you've seen residents experiencing after violent and traumatic events. We acknowledge this pain, fear, trauma and hurt. Violence hurts all of us. Living in fear hurts all of us. Racism hurts all of us too. We see all these important issues every day as we provide vital services and stand alongside community members as they tell us their stories, concerns and hopes. No one should have to fear sending their children to school. No one should be afraid to leave their home. No one should have different access to resources because of their race or ethnicity. These current realities are all unacceptable. We must come together and address all these issues, and it becomes impossible to do so without every leader, staff member and community member being engaged as a full participant.

We must also work together to keep our residents and communities safe - and that includes being transparent about the county's budget investments. You have yet to express any remorse or regret regarding your frequent overspending that has cost taxpayers millions. All the while, Ramsey County has proactively invested tens of millions of dollars into public safety initiatives in just the last few years, including an additional \$16 million just last year that was invested into public safety response programs aimed at addressing the root causes of crime and moving toward public safety delivery systems that are better equipped to respond to situations involving mental health and other issues that you frequently state you care about. Despite your lack of meaningful engagement with the county board and systems partners on these efforts, we continue to move forward with these and other programs that address the whole spectrum of issues involved in building a safe community. We challenge you to redirect the energy and resources you put into your sensationalized social media efforts into bringing our entire community together to develop real solutions across systems that create prosperous and safe communities for everyone.

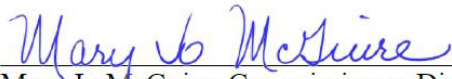
A first step toward progress would be apologizing to the county commissioners you excluded from your recent letter. They deserve to know that you acknowledge your actions were not right and that, moving forward, you will provide them with the same level of respect that they have continually provided to you.

It is our hope that we can move forward from this stronger and even more committed and focused on our residents and our responsibility to them. We welcome further conversations with you about public safety and community that are grounded in good-faith, collaboration and meaningful action.

Sincerely,



Trista MatasCastillo, Board Chair, District 3



Mary Jo McGuire, Commissioner, District 2



Rafael Ortega, Commissioner, District 5



Victoria Reinhardt, Commissioner, District 7



Nicole Frethem, Commissioner, District 1



Rena Moran, Commissioner, District 4



Mai Chong Xiong, Commissioner, District 6