



PHOENIX LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSOCIATION

The Professional Association of Phoenix Police Officers Since 1975

April 25, 2017

Mr. Ed Zuercher
City Manager,
City of Phoenix
200 W. Washington St.
Phoenix AZ, 85003

Dear Ed:

Many thanks for your letter dated April 13, 2017. While my original correspondence was directed at the Mayor and City Council members elected by the public, I certainly appreciate you weighing in with feedback. While I am reluctant to get into a prolonged back-and-forth, I do want to respond to some of the points in your letter that demand some clarification.

Let me start first with where we agree: For the men and women of the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association, public safety is the number one priority in the City of Phoenix. It is from that starting point that every concern enumerated in my letter flows. We simply want to make the residents of our City safer, as we are charged to do every day on the front lines. Your letter's support of that position is duly noted, and much appreciated.

With that in mind, I do want to call your attention to something critical. In my original letter dated March 15th, I did not mention a word about police compensation. While our organization is obviously concerned with the fact that our members are undercompensated, that was not the point of my letter. Regardless, your letter noted police officer compensation in its opening paragraphs and went on at length about officer pay and pensions. That's certainly your prerogative, Ed, but, to be clear, the 2008 pay raise you referred to was virtually eliminated over the next several years by pay cuts and give backs we took on to help the City balance its budget and support resident safety. Additionally, we remain as concerned as you about the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System and its impact on the City budget. While we did not cause the PSPRS crisis, its funding shortfall is precisely the reason that PLEA, along with other public safety labor organizations, helped lead the way on not one but two pension reform ballot measures over the past three years.

Our members could have fought against these measures, which have police officers contributing more, working longer and earning less in retirement. Instead, Phoenix police officers “took one for the team.” Twice.

On the subject of money, you also noted that 50 percent of the City’s General Fund goes to funding the Phoenix Police Department. While I don’t disagree with your math, I feel compelled to point out that the City’s total budget for 2016-17 across all sources of funds is \$3.96 billion. The General Fund represents just 31 percent of the Phoenix budget. By that accounting method, the \$500 million spent on the PPD via the General Fund represents only about 12.6 percent of the City’s overall budget. While we understand that the Phoenix enterprise fund system of finance allows areas like Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport to grow heavy with cash, we do find it a shame that the success of some areas of the City organization don’t seem to function as a “rising tide that lifts all boats.” Additionally, isolating certain funds as “off the table” seems to present a distorted picture of the City’s budget math.

Later in your letter, you give much-deserved credit to the City Council for refusing to layoff police officers in light of the budget stresses brought on the Great Recession. I could not agree with you more. Those layoffs would have been devastating to our City. However, I also feel compelled to point out that the City’s failure to hire for attrition was a form of de facto police layoffs. This failure to hire to replace retiring officers or those who left for other reasons allowed our manpower on the frontlines to wither over the past few years, as I pointed out in my previous letter. You know the math as well as I do: From 1,342 officers on patrol in 2009 to 1,038 first-responders in 2014 to an all-time low of 775 patrol officers. We acknowledge the number of first responders is now up to 998 however, that number currently includes 94 who are still in training and not solo capable. It is also important to note that this is not due entirely to hiring but also to the 140 detectives and 15 supervisors Chief Williams was forced to strip out of detective assignments to backfill patrol spots. Again, we agree with you: laying off another 400 officers would have put Phoenix police services in an unimaginable quandary. Even so, we are in a crisis as you read this letter, even without those additional layoffs. While you may look at that crisis as a financial fact of life – as Phoenix simply making do with a “sustainable budgetary amount” in terms of a police department – we look at this as a problem that demands a solution, not simply an explanation on a piece of paper.

Finally, I’ll leave you with this. My letter focused intensely on the rise in response times in Phoenix. I did so for a reason: After 28 years as a cop in this City, the majority spent patrolling a beat, I can tell you that when citizens are in danger, nothing else matters. We need to get there quickly, we need to get there prepared, and we need to be ready for action. Your letter mentioned response times in one sentence. While I’m a cop, not a literary critic, this was a glossing over of the key fact driving this crisis. At any given moment in our City, we have as few as 300 officers

on a given shift working to patrol 530 square miles. That means we do not have the manpower we need to respond to the emergencies our taxpayers suffer.

That, I am sure you will agree, is simply not acceptable.

Thank you again for your time. As you noted, our organization agrees with the International Association of Chiefs of Police analysis of manpower as well as even more recent data obtained on the 10 largest cities: We believe that a rate of 2.5 officers per 1,000 residents represents an acceptable staffing level that will allow a City the size of Phoenix to provide sustainable levels of police services to the citizens and provide increased safety for the officers who willingly step into the gap on a daily basis. That would translate into a police force of between 4,000-4,200 officers depending on whose population numbers are used. It's important to note that 2.5 is an average staffing level and that many cities and police departments staff at much higher levels. In turn, you have made it clear that 3,125 police officers is the "sustainable budgetary amount" at the present moment. With the upcoming City Council budget vote looming, I would strongly urge you to reconsider that position. You cited \$125 million as the cost of hiring the 1,000 officers necessary to fill this gap. I would hope that in an annual budget of \$4 billion, we could find a 3 percent shortfall somewhere. More importantly, I hope we can find additional common ground and solutions that will allow our City to have the police force our residents demand and expect, not merely the police force we believe we can afford.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Crane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ken" being more prominent than the last name "Crane".

Ken Crane
President
Phoenix Law Enforcement Association