



PRESS RELEASE

Tacoma Police Department
Tacoma, Washington
cityoftacoma.org/police

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 14, 2020

MEDIA CONTACTS

Wendy Haddow, Tacoma Police Department Public Information Officer, 253-591-5968
whaddow@cityoftacoma.org

An Open Letter to Residents of Tacoma from Chief of Police Don Ramsdell

Tacoma, Wash. – These are difficult, challenging times. The Tacoma Police Department strives to enforce the law in a fair and impartial manner, and we do so now in a city and nation reeling to find a path forward to, finally, address the inequities created by a system that has adversely affected communities of color. I give you my word, our department will continue to focus on accountability for our actions and on lasting, meaningful reform. But first, I want to set the record straight and tell you where I stand on issues of critical importance to our community.

In our hometown paper on Saturday, the editorial board claimed I was “hiding behind a legal argument” in not discussing the case of Mr. Manuel Ellis.

I am not hiding behind anything.

I have offered my most sincere condolences to Mr. Ellis’ family, made public statements along the way and been very clear on the process going forward. Here is what I won’t do: Comment on a case that must be investigated independently – and that means I cannot have access to any details about that investigation before it is completed.

The editorial reported that I agree with the police union that our officers “will be exonerated.” We have asked the newspaper to retract that statement. Actually, I said we’ll wait for the independent investigation and review before making any decisions.

When asked if I support Black Lives Matter protests, I said I support every person’s right to peacefully protest. I want to take this opportunity to unequivocally state that I support the Black Lives Matter movement fully and understand the need for fair and impartial policing.

The times we’re experiencing and issues that we face are more complex and important than can be captured in one editorial. We must all strive to chart a course forward with compassion and understanding. We can do that by listening, *really listening* to each other. If I don’t “step up to the microphone with regularity”, I hope you see listening as productive as talking. The day after publication

of the coroner's report in the Manuel Ellis case, I met with the Ministerial Alliance, Black Collective, NAACP and others – to listen. Since then, I've met with some of our community's African-American ministers to keep that conversation moving forward. I will continue on that path.

By listening to our community, I have learned much over the years. In part, that listening led me to implement training to recognize implicit bias, undo institutional racism, emphasize cultural competency, make improvements to the way our police force handles crisis intervention and de-escalation, understand mental health crises and assure procedural justice. Let me again be clear: simply implementing training is not the solution to all issues. Listening isn't enough. Much work remains. And we will do that work. The leadership of our department must model the behavior we expect and that starts with me. I strive to set that example and will continue to seek ways to improve this department, such as introducing body-worn cameras, creating a community trauma response team and more. Frankly, our work is never done in continually improving and you have my word that we will continue to improve as a department.

Finally, I would also like to recognize the compassion and empathy our community has shown during this difficult time. We hear your anger, frustrations and hopes. We share in all those emotions. I want you to know we continue to be committed to engaging with you on topics of safety, community policing and race. And we will continue that work until everyone feels safe in Tacoma.

###