

JOSEPH E. SOLOMON
CHIEF OF POLICE
CITY OF METHUEN, MA

January 8, 2021

Mayor Neil P. Perry
City of Methuen
The Searles Building – Room 306
41 Pleasant Street
Methuen, MA 01844

Dear Mayor Perry,

I am writing to inform you of my intent to retire from the Methuen Police Department as I turn 60 this month. I am proud of my 35-years of service to the citizens of the City of Methuen and am enormously grateful for the honor of serving as Chief of Police for 18 years. I have cherished the opportunity to have a career that I've truly loved and am grateful for all the outstanding men and women with whom I have worked over these many years.

As a life-long resident of Methuen, I believe this decision is made in the best interest of our community, the men and women of the Methuen Police Department, and perhaps most importantly, the members of my family. While I remain confident in my ability to defend my personal and professional performance in any forum, the ceaseless baseless attacks on my integrity, together with the constant political interference in the management of the department, have created a negative environment that is detrimental to the city, the dedicated members of the department, and to my family and friends.

Over these years, I have always fought for what I believe has been in the best interest of our police department and our collective obligation to serve and protect our neighbors throughout the city. This decision – to move on personally and professionally – is made with exactly that goal in mind. It's time for the men and woman of the Methuen Police Department to move forward with new leadership and without the political distractions of the past few years. I'm confident the Executive Development Principal which I have utilized during my entire leadership tenure, leaves the Methuen Police Department with a talented, well-educated and a highly trained group of police leaders. I hope that those police leaders will be able to run the Methuen Police Department as the professional and effective law enforcement agency that it has become without the improper interference of politicians that has become all too common in recent years.

It is difficult to say the least, to sum up a career that has spanned more than three decades of public service. The members of the Methuen Police Department are rightly my second family. I have shed blood, sweat and tears with them and I would not have had it any other way. It has been an honor to patrol the streets alongside them. My heartfelt love for them will be carried with me forever.

During my tenure, we have achieved many things not believed possible. I have tried to be a transformational leader – a change agent – striving to foster a leadership environment that enabled us to work as a team to make each day better than the day before. My vision for the department has been ***“Quality customer service with a community engagement perspective.”*** The long-forgotten policing of

the past was rekindled in our commitment to quality customer service, groundbreaking two-way open communication and accessibility, and the building of trust between our officers and the community. Although I would argue this approach has had a positive impact citywide, our most significant success rests in the improved quality of life experienced by the residents in the Arlington Neighborhood. The revitalization of this neighborhood – which was literally accomplished block-by-block – has had a direct positive impact on their quality of life and on the overall reduction of crime in our city.

Our commitment to social media is a direct result of our goal to achieve two-way open communication and accessibility. Our social media communication platform is referenced internationally in the law enforcement community as a program to emulate. Our social media communication and engagement program was recognized when I was invited to be the Keynote Speaker at the 2017 International Social Media in Law Enforcement Conference.

As I reflect on my career, there are many personal and departmental achievements that give me great pride:

- **COMMUNITY POLICING** – As a Lieutenant, I was honored to receive the ***Community Policing Shared Vision Award*** from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). This award – the first such award in the history of the IACP – was the culmination of our work in the Arlington Neighborhood. Personally, what mattered most to me, was the fact the nomination for the award came directly from community members.
- **SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER TEAM** – Nearly 20 years ago, I began building a one-of-a-kind school resource officer (SRO) team, comprised of an SRO in every school together with a dedicated SRO supervisor. Working with our youth has been rewarding and the benefits to our society immeasurable. This initiative was matched with another first for Methuen – a professionally trained tactical team of officers to respond to school-based emergencies, hostage rescues, school shootings, and search and rescue needs.

Our SRO program and team concept models continue to receive interest from all over the country. I have been honored to share Methuen's innovative leadership and experience at numerous national school safety conferences.

- **LAW ENFORCEMENT TECHNOLOGY** – I have been committed to innovation in the field of law enforcement technology for many years. Many firsts for law enforcement were developed, refined and/or born in cooperation with the Methuen Police Department and a private or government partner.
 - ✓ Beginning in 2013, the first global “internal automated shot detection system” was developed and launched in a partnership between Methuen Police and the BBN division of Raytheon Corporation. This shot detection system is installed in all our public schools. This technology development has had a tremendous positive impact internationally, making schools, government buildings and businesses a much safer place.
 - ✓ In 2014, we began a first for Massachusetts – a Body Worn Camera Pilot Program. The program was launched as a permanent program in 2015 after a study and survey. This program, initially viewed as a potential intrusion in privacy, has become a necessity in 2020 and has proven to be a critical component in police accountability. This program encompasses a full digital evidence collection, retention and sharing platform.

- ✓ In 2017, we were one of the first law enforcement agencies to join another pilot program – the Nuance text to speech software for our cruisers and report writing software. Of the many benefits this program offered for productivity and report completeness, none was more important than the possibility of preventing police ambushes. An officer can sit in his squad car and dictate notes while still watching the streets around him. This is especially important to officers, given the rise in police ambushes, which spiked in 2016 and remain a concern today. Additionally, the more an officer has his head up in his squad car, the more they are engaged with the community. In my opinion, the biggest advantage of this voice recognition tool is the safety of our officers.
- ✓ In 2017, we also successfully launched a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system inside our emergency response cruisers. This was another first for Methuen. This required intense work with the unions to gather support. This program allows for a significant increase in officer safety while allowing for a quicker more efficient dispatch of officers to unfolding emergency situations. In my opinion, this initiative makes our community a safer place to live, work and visit. GPS locators in police vehicles is still not widely utilized in Massachusetts; accomplishing this role out was a significant achievement.
- ✓ In 2018, we joined a small group of police departments in the testing and development of an application named BOLO mobile. This pilot program led to the issuance of the App BOLO which is now widely utilized by law enforcement. This App allows for the instant notification of wanted and missing individuals to be shared with all members of our department and any other law enforcement agency we choose. This has been a major improvement for officer safety and the locating of missing persons.

- **METHUEN POLICE/NECC POLICE ACADEMY** – In 2013, I began studying the need for a local police academy to service Essex County. Over a two-year period, agreements were developed with the Massachusetts Police Training Committee (MPTC) and Northern Essex Community College (NECC) to launch a pilot program academy which became known as the Methuen Police/NECC Police Academy. The academy – which reflects the leadership and innovation of the Methuen Police Department – is running strong today and has become the most sought-after academy in the Commonwealth. Departments from the Cape to Western Massachusetts request seats for their recruits. The academy has trained hundreds of police officers from numerous departments. The quality of the recruit officer graduating is unmatched by any other academy.
- **SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER INITIATIVES** – In 2013, through close monitoring of the use of Opioids within our community, I became concerned with the rising number of overdoses. I began a mission to provide assistance to those suffering from substance use disorder (SUD) with a non-law enforcement approach. By 2014, we issued the lifesaving Opioid reversal drug Nasal Naloxone to our officers. At the time, this was seen as unprecedented and risky. Today, it is seen as a necessary tool for a police officer to have.

By 2015, we launched a CARES initiative which hired two Community Engagement Specialists who were trained and experienced in SUD. While many cities are seeing a significant increase in overdoses during the pandemic, we have seen a decrease in Methuen of over 20%. Our department also fostered a partnership with the Merrimack Valley Prevention and Substance Abuse Project. In partnership with this group, we sponsored the first annual Opioid public education day. Last year, we participated in the fourth annual public education day. The impact of our partnerships and initiatives has been felt throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The efforts we have undertaken have

been nationally recognized and have resulted in my appointment to the Police Assisted Addiction Recovery Initiates (PAARI) National Police Council. We have been saving lives everyday as a result of this vision becoming a reality.

- **UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEM** – The need for searching areas that have limited ability to reach by foot or vehicle for missing persons and to give us an overwatch was an area of concern for me. As a result of studying the situation, the Methuen police purchased an Unmanned Aircraft System (drone) and trained two officers to F.A.A. standards. These standards required a 32-hour course and passing of a F.A.A. exam. In addition, we adopted the use of a drone for search and rescue; assisting with emergency situations and /or exigent circumstances; large public gatherings; or other situations when it is authorized and where a visual perspective of the drone can provide and assist with an officer safely on the ground.

The department also wrote and implemented a policy covering the proper usage of the drone to ensure all legal standards are met in accordance with both State and Federal guidelines. This was another first for the Methuen Police Department. With the large-scale protests that have unfolded this past year, I have received numerous inquiries into our Drone program and our body worn camera program. As these innovative programs are beginning to become mainstream, I have had inquiries from throughout the country. Again, our police department was a national leader in innovation and foresight.

- **UNDERWATER SEARCH AND RESCUE** – To further expand our ability to conduct underwater search and rescue and inspections on our waterways, we researched, purchased, trained and deployed a dual side scanning sonar unit and an unmanned underwater submarine for our Marine Unit. Another first for our department.
- **BLACK LIVES MATTER** – One monumentally rewarding event that occurred just this year was the peaceful and productive Black Lives Matter protest in our City. This event took many hours to plan, direct, and coordinate. I had the opportunity to march with the protesters and talk with them before, during, and after the event. The monumental reward came at the end of the protest when the organizers took the time to thank the Methuen Police Department for their professional and receptive attitude while policing a very difficult event. This event was noticeably different from these types of events that unfolded around our country and our Commonwealth. I credit the organizers, marchers and our professionally trained and companionate police department for the success of this event.
- **PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AND RECOGNITION** – In the law enforcement profession, being recognized by your peers gives you a sense of personal pride and validation in your professional competencies.
 - ✓ In 2016, the first National School Leadership Academy for Chiefs and Sheriffs was launched. This academy was specifically designed to teach and certify law enforcement leaders in school safety leadership best practices. I have been invited each year to present as a main speaker or as a core subject matter expert.
 - ✓ Since November 2016, I have had the privilege to serve on the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Executive Board as an appointed member. Additionally, I was elected to the executive board of the Massachusetts Major City Chiefs in November of 2019. I have served as the Chairperson of both the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police School Safety and Security Committee and the Chiefs

Assistance Committee. I have been a member of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Civil Service Committee and Training and Education Committee for approximately 10 years.

- ✓ As a result of many of the initiatives noted above, I have been invited to the White House and the Executive Offices three times during the Obama and Trump Administrations. This first-for-Methuen recognition afforded our community not only national recognition but also provided us a voice in the overall national strategies being deliberated in the areas of school safety and Opioid and substance use disorder.
- ✓ In 2018, I was privileged to travel to Washington D.C. to be included in a *Time* Magazine cover story and traveling display across America entitled “Guns in America.” This opportunity was something I would never have thought was imaginable for a cop from Methuen.

Each of these examples represent an important milestone for me personally and for the Methuen Police Department. Working together as a team, we have built a modern, innovative, and highly effective law enforcement and customer service organization for the City of Methuen. Even at a time when a few local political figures have chosen to build their political popularity by attacking me and the good men and women of the department, I firmly believe the citizens of our city feel safe and secure because of the competence and professionalism of our officers and staff.

For sure, the COVID-19 pandemic, the related economic downturn, and the increased racial and political divisions have added even more challenges to our increasingly complex obligations. I’m proud of our approach to each of these challenges and would note that we accomplished our mission while underspending our FY’20 budget by well over \$800,000.

I would be remiss if I failed to note my strong disagreement with the provisions of the recently released report of the Massachusetts OIG that relate directly to my personal performance. Since I was never interviewed by anyone from the OIG – never given the most basic common courtesy to respond to accusations I believe are blatantly false – I am frustrated and deeply disappointed. Although I am certainly willing and able to fight as I have in the past, as I noted earlier in this letter, I have decided to act in the best interest of our community and the department I love and respect. The impact that another long, drawn-out fight would have on the city, the department, and on my family is something I believe should be avoided at all costs.

In closing, please accept this communication in the spirit it was written. To convey my heartfelt appreciation for the ability to serve my hometown community for over three decades. I wish the best for my brother and sister law enforcement officers and for the City of Methuen and its residents. I hope this helps bring some closure to past disputes and aids the Methuen Police Department in moving forward.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH E. SOLOMON
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Chief of Police