



# BOARD OF SUPERVISORS County of Dane

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TO: County Executive Parisi

FROM: Supervisor Dana Pellebon, District 33  
Co-Chair, CJC – Community Court Advisory Subcommittee  
[pellebon.dana@countyofdane.com](mailto:pellebon.dana@countyofdane.com)

DATE: August 9, 2023

SUBJECT: Response to Memo

As the co-chair of the CJC-Community Court Advisory Subcommittee, I am grateful for your update on the hiring process for the Director of the Office of Justice Reform. In addition, your long-standing commitment to working towards eliminating racial disparities in our criminal legal system is valued and appreciated. The effort to establish the Office of Criminal Justice Reform and a community court are evidence of the work you, county staff, the County Board, those with lived experience, and our community partners have dedicated to this goal.

Earlier this year, while in the final stages of hiring the new Director for this important office, after having received more than 40 applications from around the country, you put a halt to the hiring process. This was done without input or direction from the County Board or this committee. This decision imperiled not only the department but most importantly the forward progress of the Community Court initiative. After this decision was made, shortly thereafter, you appointed former Sheriff David Mahoney as interim Director to continue forward momentum on this project.

June 22, 2023, the Public Protection & Judiciary Committee held a hearing on the appointment of former Sheriff Mahoney. The appointment was postponed indefinitely in committee for the following reasons: a majority of the committee did not find the answers to the questions asked of former Sheriff Mahoney to be satisfactory for confirmation and felt that anyone with a law enforcement or probation and parole background should not be considered for the Director position (neither interim nor permanent) that directly affects reform in our criminal legal system. We are all aware of the history of mistrust the BIPOC communities most impacted by the criminal legal system have in the system and law enforcement in general. In order for reform to happen, having a neutral party is imperative to the process as a whole.

This does not negate the importance of our law enforcement partners in the process overall. In fact, Dane County recently elected a progressive, Black County Sheriff to lead our Sheriff's Office. We not only look forward to partnering with Sheriff Calvin Barrett, we also value his and the Office's input on these matters.

After the appointment was postponed, Chair Patrick Miles indicated to your office that the County Board would not consider further law enforcement-based appointments to this position due to the reasons stated above. Despite this, your memo indicated your position to continue to move your original appointment forward versus completing the hiring process expeditiously or appointing an appropriate interim Director based on the feedback given to your office.

After receiving your memo, I felt that it was important to relay the events that preceded this memo and clearly state that as it stands, the Community Court process could not move forward as planned and detailed in our grant application without a Director of the Department of Justice Reform. I wanted to give the committee an opportunity for input on how to proceed, including the option of reviving the postponed appointment if the committee felt that was the correct path forward.

This committee and the chosen members were purposely engaged to speak directly to the Community Court creation and vision. The input of the community partners, those with lived experience, key staff, county departments, and elected officials is vital to ensuring the integrity and success of this initiative. The vision for how this committee should give input has been fully realized.

To that end, we started the discussion to receive feedback about how we should move forward with this appointment. The feedback thus far was clear. The committee does not think that law enforcement should occupy the Director of the Department of Justice Reform position.

However, this conversation is not complete, and we intend to revisit it for input and detail the full impact of this decision on the process as a whole. In the interest of making sure that your position is clear, I would like for you to join us at our next committee meeting on Tuesday, August 29, 2023, at 12:15 pm in room 351 or virtually.

Thank you again and I hope you will attend the committee meeting to join our discussion about a path forward.

cc:

Clerk of Courts Carlo Esqueda, Chair, Dane County Community Justice Council  
Members of the CJC Community Court Advisory Subcommittee