

06/01/20

I wanted to take some time to reflect about what I wanted to say before issuing a statement in regards to the appalling and tragic death of George Floyd in Minnesota last week. I am saddened that these events continue to happen in our country.

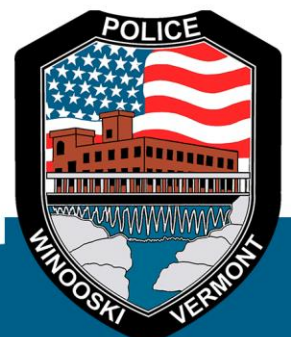
Once again, we find ourselves devastated by an appalling and heartbreaking use of force incident that has resulted in those we have sworn to protect and serve, fearing for their own safety at the hands of those whose duty it is to keep them safe.

While we have yet to gain all available details about the incident that took place in Minneapolis on Monday, the videos we've seen are abundantly clear. What more do we need to see or know to conclude that the actions of the Minneapolis police officers involved in the death of George Floyd were heinous and unacceptable.

Regardless of further information that may be discovered in this case, absolutely nothing can justify the actions or inactions of the involved officers. If someone calls for help, it is our duty to help. When struggling with someone we are attempting to arrest who tells us they cannot breathe, we are trained to reposition them and offer immediate relief. And while there were moral and tactical shortcomings here, there exists the added weight in the knowledge that these occurred in the all-too-familiar context of police victimizing an unarmed person of color – sadly, an unsurprising tragedy.

To stand as a profession and condemn the actions of the officers involved in these many tragic events is a start, but we need to do so much more. Most importantly police executives need to take steps to ensure the officers under their command are provided a culture that values equality, respect, human dignity and above all the sanctity of all human life. Leadership needs to continuously support and promote these values and recognize officers that are positive examples in their agency.

Police executives must also have the courage and fortitude to call out employees in real time that show warning signs of the disregard of policies and procedures, excessive use of force, a lack of utilizing de-escalation techniques, and any indifference to the worth and value of every human being. Police Mental Wellness programs must become accepted culture, both embraced and utilized to ensure officers can perform their jobs exhibiting the core values of a guardian and partner within the community they serve.



City of Winooski

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We are all outraged by the brutal actions of the officers involved in the death of George Floyd. Members of the Winooski Police Department stand with other police departments throughout the country and openly condemn this egregious behavior and I pledge we will work tirelessly to ensure nothing like this ever happens in our community.

- Members of the Winooski Police Department have been trained in the "Integrating Communication Assessment and Tactics de-escalation program developed by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). We also have 2 instructors on staff to continue to provide this training as part of our annual use of force updates.
- Officers have been trained to de-escalate situations, and that time is their friend when interacting with anyone that is agitated or experiencing a personal crisis.
- The Community Outreach Team's social workers are utilized on a daily basis to provide outreach and resources for people that are experiencing a mental health crisis.
- In January our use of force policy was updated to ensure officers have a duty to intervene and stop, and must report excessive use of force by another employee.
- Officers continue to carry and deploy Narcan at overdoses saving lives.
- Members of the department have taken part in several cultural competency and implicit bias trainings over the past two years.

I personally have had the opportunity to build a daily professional relationship with an educated, understanding wise person of color that also happens to be an exceptional human being. I have the luxury to talk with her about race and bias, and to see the world through a different lens, and I always appreciate her perspective. She has made me a better father, police chief and human being.

In conclusion I am grateful for the dedication of the professionals working at the Winooski Police Department. Please know that the impact of these tragic events are not lost on any of the police professionals in Winooski. We will continue to have block parties, coffee with a cop and BBQ's. We welcome any opportunity to speak with all of Winooski's residents and we are here to serve you as guardians of our community.

Respectfully,

Rick Hebert
Chief of Police

