



Fraternal Order of Police

FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

INDEPENDENCE LODGE #1- 18300 E. M 78 HWY, INDEPENDENCE, MO 64055
(816) 796-9133

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council,

The City Manager and his staff have been working diligently with the leadership of The Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #1 over the last two months to develop long-term solutions that will address our staffing shortages in the Independence Police Department. These shortages came about due to limited applicants and a wave of retirements that naturally follows about 30 years after large-scale hiring efforts as were seen during the 80's and 90's. A second and third wave of police officer retirements is set to hit in less than five and ten years, respectively. The recent national narrative and negative portrayal of policing and police officers compounded our problem with a marked effect on the number of qualified applicants seeking to enter the profession. Our testing processes routinely involved 200 to 300 applicants in years past; now we feel fortunate to have 30 prospective hires show up.

While the national narrative has had a detrimental effect on recruiting, citizens of Independence commonly go out of their way to contact our officers and profess their admiration and thanks for the service to the community. We recognize and appreciate the support of our community and the vocal support we receive from the Council. We need this support now more than ever before. Current staffing levels do not allow us to meet the needs or expectations of our stakeholders. Calls for service to address quality of life issues are delayed while the never-ending series of higher-priority emergency calls absorbs our resources. This is not a reflection of the importance the callers hold, but a necessary allocation of personnel based upon current staffing and the minimum response required to safely reach resolution in dangerous and unpredictable circumstances.

Prop P is proving to be a successful way to generate revenue necessary to increase the number of police officers available to respond to emergency and non-emergency calls alike. It was also a vote of support from the citizens; a recognition of the need and attempt to meet said need. The need remains. The Independence Police Department sends representatives around the region in recruiting efforts. They engage in events at military bases, colleges, and Police Academies developing leads and providing information to prospective applicants. Results have been marginal. The hiring teams of surrounding agencies and even national recruiting teams present salary and benefits packages comparable to or even better than those offered by the City of Independence. The best applicants have their pick of the numerous agencies competing to fill vacancies. We want the very best of those applicants. In order to attract the very best, we must be more aggressively competitive.

Our conversations with City Manager Zach Walker and Assistant City Manager Adam Norris have been productive and candid. We entered these conversations with the sole intent of addressing recruiting and retention concerns, not reopening the entire contract that was recently approved. Numerous ideas were bounced around with the understanding that there was a need for immediate adjustment and a requirement of long-term sustainability. We believe a two-pronged approach may be necessary to meet both goals. Use of a portion of the American Recovery Plan Act funds for a one-time adjustment for existing employees will help address the need for immediate action and benefit retention efforts. The second aspect of this approach is an amendment to existing Prop P language to allow for more flexibility in spending while still meeting the spirit of the ordinance. This must be done through a ballot measure that allows the citizens to voice their opinions. The Fraternal Order of Police cannot in good conscience support any other method used to modify the current language. Any effort

to modify the language must meet the original intent of increasing the total number of police officers that was approved by the voters.

The Independence for All plan touted Public Safety as one of the top priorities of the City Leaders and staff. We are at a critical juncture where decisions made now will have a solidifying foundational effect for the long-term betterment of our citizens and visitors. Failure to address the needs of the Police Department will result in further losses due to retirement and good, qualified officers seeking greener pastures. This City Council and Mayor have voiced support for the Police Department and its personnel on many occasions. We ask that you continue that support by directing immediate action through ARPA funds and placing an amendment to the Prop P language on the November ballot that provides long-term sustainability. Given acceptable language, the Lodge is prepared to commit resources and personnel as an investment to the furtherance of this amendment. A unified Mayor and City Council working with the City Manager and the members of the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #1 will present a clear message to the voters that improved police coverage and services are on the horizon. We are confident that our shared goals are within our reach and collaborative efforts will prove beneficial for all involved.

On behalf of the members of FOP Lodge #1,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jason Petersen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jason Petersen
President
Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #1