

## ***Moving Police Reform forward, Keeping an eye on crime***

**Greetings, Memphis.** After careful deliberation and consideration, several Police Reform ordinances proposed after Tyre Nichols' death were passed during the City Council's March 7 meeting. The ordinances focus on transparency, accountability and safety for the public and officers.

But first – to give some credit where it is due: At the meeting, the Council honored Animal Control Officer Lawrence Higginbottom of Memphis Animal Services for his selection as the National Animal Care and Control Association's 2022 Animal Control Officer of the Year. This award is the highest in Ofc. Higginbottom's field. A MAS employee since 2017 and Animal Control Officer since 2019, Ofc. Higginbottom has become well-known and admired for his positive attitude and kindness; and is recognized as the rare person who is gifted in working with both people and animals. The Council offered its congratulations to Ofc. Higginbottom, along with its appreciation for his services to both the two-legged and four-legged citizens of Memphis.



**Memphis City Council Chairman Martavius Jones congratulates Memphis Animal Services Animal Control Officer Lawrence Higginbottom on being named 2022's national Animal Control Officer of the Year.**

### **Council at Work**

**Almost there** – After receiving extensive comment from members of the public at the March 7 meeting, the City Council passed five of the six Police Reform ordinances brought forward. The five ordinances that passed their Third and Final Reading were:

- An Ordinance to establish a procedure for the Memphis Police Department to conduct an annual independent review of the Police Training Academy and all training techniques
  
- An Ordinance to amend the City of Memphis Code or Ordinances ... to Require the Division of Police Services to use Only Appropriately Marked Law Enforcement Vehicles to Conduct Traffic Stops
  
- An Ordinance to establish a Public Safety Reporting Protocol in regard to the disposition by the Memphis Police Department of Recommendations by the Civilian Law Enforcement Review Board (CLERB) to the (MPD) regarding CLERB's disposition of complaints involving police misconduct, the use of deadly force by police officers and deaths and injuries of persons occurring while in police custody
  
- An Ordinance to establish an Independent Review Process of Memphis Police Department Incidents involving the use of Excessive, Unnecessary and or Deadly Force by Police Officers and Deaths or Serious Injuries of Persons Occurring while in Police Custody
  
- An Ordinance to Amend the City of Memphis Code of Ordinances Relating to Public Safety for the City of Memphis Law Enforcement to Collect and Regularly Report Data Regarding Traffic Stops, Arrests, Use of Force, and Complaints

A sixth ordinance, amending the City of Memphis Code of Ordinances Vehicle and Traffic Code to clarify appropriate methods of enforcement of traffic violations, was held until the Council's March 21 meeting by one of its sponsors, District 7 Councilwoman Michalyn Easter-Thomas. Councilwoman Easter-Thomas said she was holding the ordinance to make sure that the language used therein is sufficiently clear.

The Council also considered the First Reading of an Ordinance crafted by Council Attorney Allan Wade at the request of Council members to consolidate, unify and clarify many of the provisions incorporated in the six separate ordinances. Like them, this proposal will go through two more readings before the Council votes on it. You can find the complete text of each Ordinance [here](#).

As I have stated before, the Council realizes that simply passing these ordinances will not fix the deep problems that led to the recent tragedy, nor will they satisfy everyone on either side of the complex issue of Police Reform – but they are a start. And please rest assured that this Council will continue to work toward an effective and just Police Division.

**The other side of the equation** – In addition to hearing from advocates for Police Reform, at the March 7 meeting the Council heard from several members of the public who are concerned about recent spikes in crime throughout the city. Of particular concern, of course, are violent crimes such as homicide and armed robbery; but there also has been a surge of property crimes such as auto break-ins and thefts. Perhaps most troubling about this recent spike is that many of the crimes are committed by juveniles – some as young as 11 years old.

In its Public Safety & Homeland Security Committee that morning, the Council received presentations from the Memphis Police Department on its response to a rash of auto break-ins at the City's redeveloping Liberty Park. Members of MPD Command Staff including Chief Cerelyn Davis also presented on efforts to improve officer response times to incidents. The Council also heard a presentation by the City's Group Violence Intervention Program, which is a street-level program working to prevent gang-related and retaliatory shootings.

In response to the GVIP presentation, the Council passed a Resolution asking the Memphis Shelby County Schools Board of Education and Administration to allow the 901 BLOC Squad to interact with students in all MSCS schools as needed to prevent violent activity. 901 BLOC Squad is one of several arms of the Group Violence Intervention Program working with those at risk of being a perpetrator or victim of gun violence in an effort to head off shootings.

The Council also passed its part of a Joint Resolution with the Shelby County Board of Commissioners requesting that the Shelby County District Attorney's Office and the Courts create and maintain a Data Dashboard. The Council believes that one aspect of Memphis' crime problem is that there is little transparency – and thus little accountability – in the justice system. Although the metaphor of the "Revolving Door" is frequently invoked, there currently is no centralized way for the public – or the Council, for that matter, to keep track of the cases that enter the court system. This is important because it doesn't matter how many arrests our police officers make, if the offenders are simply released with little or no penalty to commit the same crimes again.

**Memphis in May on the Move** – On a brighter note, the Council passed a Resolution establishing a Parks Restoration Fund, reallocating and reappropriating \$500,000 from the Fiscal Year 2023 Capital Improvement Program Budget to the fund. The money represents the City's commitment toward any damages that might be done to the revamped Tom Lee Park by this year's Memphis in May Festival. The Council passed the Resolution upon word of a long-sought agreement between the Memphis River Parks Partnership, which operates the park, and the Memphis in May International Festival. The Council commends all parties for their long and hard work on this agreement, and wishes this year's Memphis in May much success.

**Grant Season is Coming!** – Finally, as the Council prepares to go into Budget season, we laid the framework at the March 7 meeting for our annual Council Grant program. The Council passed a Resolution effectively asking Mayor Strickland to allocate money for the program in his Budget – an allocation that is then divided between the 13 Councilmembers for allotment to qualifying non-profit organizations throughout the city. This year, the Council expects to begin taking applications for the Grant Program on May 15, with the application window open until July 1.

Interested parties are asked to watch the Council's websites, social media and digital channels, and this newsletter for further details.

**The Bottom Line**

I am honored by the opportunity to work with my fellow Council Members to enhance this city we call home. Stay tuned for future Council updates as we keep you informed regarding the activities taking place here at City Hall. As always, for an archive of meeting recordings, you may visit and view our [Council Meetings](#) here.



For Memphis,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martavius D. Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Martavius D. Jones,  
Chairman, Memphis City Council