

October 31, 2022

Omaha City Council Members
Via E-mail

RE: RES. 2022-1059 (Resolution regarding purchase of Armored Vehicle)

Members of the Omaha City Council:

For over 50 years in Nebraska, the ACLU has worked in courts, legislatures, and communities to protect the constitutional and individual rights of all people. With a nationwide network of offices and millions of members and supporters, we take up the toughest civil liberties fights. Beyond one person, party, or side — we the people dare to create a more perfect union.



AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
FOUNDATION

Nebraska

134 S. 13th St.
#1010
Lincoln, NE 68508
(402) 476-8091
aclunebraska.org

We write regarding proposed resolution 1059 providing for the purchase of a \$341,678.00 armored vehicle. **We urge the Council to reject Resolution 1059 seeking to further militarize our Omaha Police Department as an unwarranted military extravagance for the police.**

The City of Omaha's suggested purchase of an armored vehicle attempts to outfit officers with firepower is far beyond what is necessary for their jobs as protectors of our communities. Sending a heavily armed military-style vehicle to transport officers to perform routine police work can dangerously escalate situations for both civilians and police officers, escalate the risks of needless violence, cause the destruction of personal property, undermine civil liberties, and unfairly impacts people of color the most.

The ACLU has previously reported on the use of armored vehicles and we found that the use of armored vehicles was rarely necessary for the types of deployments in which they were used based on two observations: (1) the numerous incidents in which an armored vehicle was deployed but not used for any obvious purpose and (2) the numerous incidents in which the SWAT team was able to accomplish its objective without the use of an armored vehicle.¹ There are alternatives to the use of armored vehicles, such as making ordinary police vehicles built for domestic law enforcement (as opposed to combat), bullet proof.

Because the use of unnecessarily aggressive techniques has a documented impact on public confidence in law enforcement, there is reason to be concerned that excessive militarization undermines public trust and community safety. This change in equipment is too often paralleled by a corresponding change in attitude whereby police conceive of themselves as "at war" with communities rather than as public servants concerned with keeping their communities safe. The ACLU

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/report/war-comes-home-excessive-militarization-american-police>.

advocates for a return to a less dangerous, more collaborative style of policing. Nebraskans should not be able to mistake our officers for soldiers.

In the wake of the brutal murder of George Floyd by police, and in response to the local, national and international demands for justice by ending anti-Black racism and policing practices, the Omaha City Council should recognize that this purchase of an armored vehicle runs contrary to any intent to build relationships with communities of color. The time is right to analyze the overmilitarization of local law enforcement agencies.

Moreover, the expense for this armored vehicle is significant. Investment in police departments ought to be related to resolving crimes and problems that elected policymakers have identified as priorities. For instance, instead of purchasing an armored vehicle, this money could be spent to bring the Omaha Police Department up to date in reporting domestic violence statistics to the Nebraska Crime Commission as required by law² or additional funding to accelerate processing of untested rape kits³.

We respectfully urge you to reject Resolution 1059 and ensure that there is an agency representative of the City of Omaha responsible for ensuring that our local law enforcement agencies are not excessively militarized. We further request these proposed funds instead be reinvested into our schools, trauma-informed training for officers, and/or community-based programs to support youth development.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and your commitment to public service.

Respectfully,



Rose Godinez
Senior Legal and Policy Counsel

CC: Mayor Jean Stothert



Nebraska

² https://omaha.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/omaha-police-and-other-agencies-didnt-report-domestic-abuse-numbers-to-crime-commission/article_77d0ecfe-980a-11eb-9bb2-93bcc2ccb325.html

³ <https://www.wowt.com/2020/12/12/omaha-police-is-working-through-1700-untested-rape-kits-in-effort-to-solve-cold-cases/>