

January 5, 2021

The Honorable Leirion Gaylor Baird  
Mayor of the City of Lincoln  
555 South 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Lincoln, NE 68508

Cc: The Honorable Members of the Lincoln City Council  
Yohance Christie, City Attorney



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Dear Mayor Gaylor Baird:

On behalf of the ACLU of Nebraska and incredible community partners and leaders such as Black Leaders Movement, Change Now Lincoln, Pastor Janet Goodman Banks, and Stand in for Nebraska we were surprised to learn of Chief Bleimeister's abrupt departure from the Lincoln Police Department to the private sector. Presumably, you will soon be searching for a new Chief of Police.

The search for a new police chief presents you with an unprecedented opportunity to back up your stated commitments to public safety for all Lincoln residents and your stated pledges to reform policing by creating an open and inclusive process in the search for the next police chief. People of Lincoln deserve a process that is transparent and prioritizes the communities most impacted by intracommunity violence, over-policing, and police misconduct. We trust that you share our belief that racism and anti-blackness is abhorrent and that it harms Black Nebraskans and Nebraskans of color. We hope you appreciate that racism is at its most pronounced through clear acts of hate and state violence and that you also recognize that racism is also ever-present and underlies policies and practices throughout public life. Racism is institutional. Dismantling this system of oppression will take all of us. Our state motto is Equality before the Law and we can only reach that aspiration if we embrace racial justice and liberation, fighting forward together with people of color leading the way.

As Mayor, your selection of City Attorney shows that you intend to carry out your pledge to collaborate with law enforcement and work for justice for all residents of Lincoln. Both you and Mr. Christie rightly pledged to address challenges facing the city and take advantage of the great opportunity to continue the city's journey towards equity, justice, and peace.<sup>[1]</sup> Your choice for police chief should be an individual who shares this view and a reform mindset.



We want to acknowledge and publicly thank you for implementing or encouraging the initial modest reforms relating to the Lincoln Police internal orders regarding Use of Force as well as the structural changes made to the Citizens Police Advisory Board. While you have overseen these modest changes to policing in Lincoln, much reform needs to be done, and we take this opportunity to again urge you to consider further reforms to police use of force policy, as many others have urged.<sup>[2]</sup> In order that you continue on your stated pledges to work to reform policing and to address institutional and interpersonal racism, we encourage you to consider applicants who believe at a minimum that Black Lives Matter, who understands systemic racism, who are dedicated to police reform and criminal justice reform so everyone in our community can be more free and more prosperous. We respectfully encourage you to be a leader who acts decisively and uses the tremendous power the people of Lincoln have entrusted you with to take your place on the right side of history.

More fundamentally, the search for a Chief of Police can provide policymakers and all community stakeholders to take a broader view of law enforcement interactions with the public, in order to foster a culture of de-escalation always, to ensure meaningful robust independent oversight, and to take a clear-eyed look at reforming, right-sizing, and reinvesting critical resources into programs that limit law enforcement interactions and that advance racial justice and economic prosperity for all, such as expanded public health opportunities, educational equity, youth development and family support programs.

People of Lincoln have requested that city leaders and policymakers look thoughtfully at our state laws and to commit to changes to provide for accountability, transparency, and to ensure justice in our police agencies. Addressing these systemic issues require comprehensive and thorough solutions considered by city leaders and enacted in city policy. This includes the selection of leadership for our police department.

The selection of leader of the Lincoln Police Department is important and necessary to ensure real systemic change. There is considerable evidence to illustrate that the Lincoln Police Department has capacity for improvement. There are relatively few officers who are people of color. The Lincoln Police announced in October of 2020 that, of the 355 officers, only 6 are Black, 15 are Hispanic, 6 are Asian, and 1 is Native American—all of which are below representation of the Lincoln population.<sup>[3]</sup> In addition to officer demographics, there are serious and persistent concerns about police practices in Lincoln. As in years past, the 2019 Crime Commission Report on Racial Profiling in traffic



stops shows disparity in traffic stops statewide against people of color, and in Lancaster County black drivers made up 10.5% of all drivers stopped, even though only 4% of Lancaster County drivers were black.<sup>[4]</sup> Additionally, news reports have uncovered troubling allegations of institutional sexism and disparate treatment of women by the Lincoln Police, both to fellow employees<sup>[5]</sup> or civilians.<sup>[6]</sup> A transparent robust search for new leadership which meaningfully includes members of the public and community leaders will install confidence in the selection for the Chief of Police.

We urge your consideration of this proposal and pledge our assistance and cooperation in assisting the Mayor and the Council in your efforts. We thank you for your public service.

Respectfully,

ACLU of Nebraska

Black Leaders Movement

Change Now Lincoln

Pastor Janet Goodman Banks

Stand in for Nebraska

<sup>[1]</sup> [https://journalstar.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/lincoln-mayor-taps-deputy-public-defender-as-next-city-attorney/article\\_08684c9e-238b-5cc7-9f91-e2a0c83b8ab1.amp.html](https://journalstar.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/lincoln-mayor-taps-deputy-public-defender-as-next-city-attorney/article_08684c9e-238b-5cc7-9f91-e2a0c83b8ab1.amp.html)

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.kfornow.com/clergy-group-suggests-recommendations-to-change-lpd-policy/>

<sup>[3]</sup> [https://journalstar.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/people-dont-want-to-be-cops-during-a-charged-time-law-enforcement-struggles-to-diversify/article\\_11e02d18-43ac-57db-9b81-89abb0254622.html](https://journalstar.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/people-dont-want-to-be-cops-during-a-charged-time-law-enforcement-struggles-to-diversify/article_11e02d18-43ac-57db-9b81-89abb0254622.html)

<sup>[4]</sup> [https://ncc.nebraska.gov/sites/ncc.nebraska.gov/files/doc/Traffic\\_Stops\\_in\\_Nebraska\\_2019\\_FIN.AL.pdf](https://ncc.nebraska.gov/sites/ncc.nebraska.gov/files/doc/Traffic_Stops_in_Nebraska_2019_FIN.AL.pdf)

<sup>[5]</sup> [https://journalstar.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ex-lincoln-officer-suing-city-alleging-toxic-culture-toward-women-within-police-department/article\\_d184f93d-2e26-5e0d-895f-65c2f4acf450.html](https://journalstar.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ex-lincoln-officer-suing-city-alleging-toxic-culture-toward-women-within-police-department/article_d184f93d-2e26-5e0d-895f-65c2f4acf450.html)

<sup>[6]</sup> [https://journalstar.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/former-lincoln-police-officer-found-guilty-of-sexual-assault/article\\_4f591fc6-2757-5eb5-8a58-87e82e4299f0.html](https://journalstar.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/former-lincoln-police-officer-found-guilty-of-sexual-assault/article_4f591fc6-2757-5eb5-8a58-87e82e4299f0.html)