



## **Statement on Public Safety and Police Chief James Craig, May 12, 2021**

### **Detroit Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability**

James Craig has announced he will step down as Detroit Police Chief. We welcome this and have called for it repeatedly. He has ceased to be a servant of the people of Detroit and has served instead as a defender and advocate of police violence.

Under his leadership, the Detroit Police Department has seen an increase in police violence. Detroit police use of force, involving killings, broken bones, and hospitalizations increased by 41% in 2020<sup>1</sup>. Craig acknowledges that police officers have become less respected and more feared by the people of Detroit, though he blames that not on police conduct, but on those who flee or confront the police, and on those who have dared to question and protest police conduct.

He has attacked elected officials and justice groups who call for public accountability and for shifting funds from militarized policing, incarceration, and criminalization, to “resources ... to tackle poverty, education inequities, and to increase job opportunities.”<sup>2</sup>

In summer 2020, under Craig’s leadership, Detroit Police became more aggressive, violently assaulting Detroit Will Breathe protesters, arresting some 400 people. Nearly all 398 cases have been dismissed for lack of evidence. When Detroit Will Breathe brought a lawsuit, the Court ruled that DPD must cease the use of “beatings, tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, sound cannons, flash grenades, chokeholds and mass arrests without probable cause.”<sup>3</sup>

Chief Craig and the City then responded by blaming the protesters and filing a countersuit against Detroit Will Breathe, alleging that the protests “repeatedly turned violent, endangering the lives of police and the public.”<sup>4</sup> For lack of evidence, this suit was thrown out by Judge Laurie Michelson, and permanently dismissed (with prejudice).

Last week, Craig responded by releasing a production-quality video, portraying Detroit Will Breathe as a violent threat and continuing falsely to refer to the countersuit as though it were still viable. Was this carefully edited presentation funded by the \$200,000 that the Detroit City Council approved to support the countersuit?

The video presented yet another narrative of the killing of Hakim Littleton, making this the fourth inconsistent, contradictory explanation of the police assault on Littleton -- three different “sets of facts” by Craig, a different “set of facts” by Prosecutor Worthy. Littleton was killed by

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter, *Detroit News*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/local/2021/04/14/rep-rashida-tlaibs-tweet-about-police-draws-pushback-from-law-enforcement/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=17788>

<sup>4</sup> Detroit Will Breathe scores win in legal fight with the city, Tresa Baldas, Detroit Free Press 3/11/21

an officer, July 10, 2020, with a point-blank shot to the back of the head while he was on the ground, tackled by another police officer.

We are relieved by Craig's departure. The highest paid official in Detroit, he used his position to support and intensify right wing policies and practices, aligning himself with the NRA, espousing arming teachers, and becoming a national spokesperson for aggressive, militarized policing and racially-biased facial recognition surveillance.

Nor have we forgotten that he was appointed by a non-elected official under Emergency Management. We are relieved by his stepping down, but not surprised that Craig has now aligned himself with the Republican party which sought so aggressively to disenfranchise Detroit voters and remains in lock-step with the Big Lie denying the outcome of last year's presidential election while embracing white supremacist right-wing groups. Craig made his political loyalties clear over the past year, aligning himself with former president Trump and his regime – the DOJ and former AG Barr – during the height of the nationwide protests against police violence last summer.

The movement for Black lives, both locally and nationally, has focused for us the debate about policing. That is the context in which this opportunity presents itself. Yes, the Board of Police Commissioners, so disempowered and largely compliant during the Duggan-Craig administration, should be a place the Detroit community can voice the qualities of listening, accountability, honesty and transparency required in new leadership.

But this is the moment when policing can truly be rethought and reimagined as public safety, opening the way for violence reduction instead of escalation, for community-based restorative justice, for neighborhood services, programs, and institutions that actually reduce violence and crime at its source. We can turn our attention now from ceaseless efforts to resist destructive leadership, which placed so many of our neighbors in danger – especially our youth – to creating new approaches to public safety and community wellbeing.