

Monday, October 4, 2021

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Mayor Michael Purzycki
800 North French St, 9th Floor
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Mayor Purzycki,

As you may be aware, this week marks the 6th year of Peace Week Delaware. All week organizations are hosting events to highlight creative solutions and pathways for Delawareans to experience more peace. This is an opportunity for people to join in the work of restoring our communities together. We are asking you, as Mayor of Wilmington, along with the City Council, to please join us in being part of the solution.

In May, you addressed the public about gun violence in Wilmington. Gun violence is maybe the most visible of the countless symptoms of historic oppression and systemic injustices, many of which continue to this day. You stated *"It is an article of faith that if we do not fix the society's underlying economic and social ills, we will never reduce crime in the long run."*

Society's underlying economic and social ills that you speak of have been caused by generations-long oppression by governmental structures, and so our elected officials in the very same governmental structures have both the power and the responsibility to help heal those injustices. Only when this happens can we hope for peace in our communities.

On Sunday, October 10, please join us at Rodney Square at 4 pm. We invite you to listen to the many amazing individuals and organizations who are fighting for justice in Wilmington. These are residents who are here, doing the work right now. Change happens most effectively from the inside, and it is up to our city government to support the work that is already under way by the very people you have been elected to serve.

You stated in your May address, *"We must rebuild our failing neighborhoods, provide better living conditions for young people, partner with social service agencies, support better mental health services, and promote stronger schools."* We applaud your intentions, but actions speak louder than words. Many residents have felt frustrated as we have seen social services shut down or moved out of downtown, to make room for new luxury condos that are meant not to help your existing population, but to bring in a new, more affluent one. We see investments in the Market Street corridor and Riverfront, and we feel that those of us who have always been here, who are working hard to improve our neglected neighborhoods,

whose children attend the most underserved schools, are not being supported. Now, this week, we are asking for you to show your support. We are asking to be heard.

In your May address, you spoke about policing as our only option. You stated that *“while we wait for long term strategies to take root, we are left with turning to our police to manage these problems... The public can have every confidence that the Wilmington Police Department is doing its job, but the system itself is failing us.”* Can we have that confidence, when officers can use excessive force or kill black men without being held accountable? The system that is failing us is built into every aspect of our lives. This system includes the police, disproportionately locking up people of color. This system includes our public schools, failing our children at alarming rates, sending even more to prison. We cannot rely on the police because mass incarceration is not the answer.

You stated that *“No one wants to see young men waste their lives in prison, but we are left with no other choices.”* We, as community activists, disagree; and we would like to sit at the table and explore together the other choices that we do have. Solutions exist within ourselves. We are asking you to listen, and to work alongside the people of your city.

As per your address, *“Wilmington has long endured stubborn poverty and an intractable crime problem... The question for us is what we do about it.”* The onus is not on you as one individual to solve these problems. In fact, alone, you cannot. We are asking for you to listen to those of us who understand the problems because we have lived them, and who can envision the solutions because they are our future.

In closing, I will remind you of one last quote. In your budget report you wrote *“It is our responsibility as elected members of our community to actually make things better by setting aside any differences that divide us, because in the end we all want the same things.”* Again, actions speak louder than words. We as your constituents need the Mayor’s office and the City Council to commit to communicating effectively, both with each other as elected officials, and with the public as the very people you represent. It is hard to watch the interpersonal politics play out within our city’s governmental structures and believe that this same structure could solve problems of violence in our city. To improve the city, first the change must come from within.

There are many resources at your disposal, mediation and nonviolent approaches that could help facilitate better governmental relationships, community organizations that could help solve seemingly unsolvable problems. But the very first step is to listen, and learn. We very much hope to see you on Sunday, and to work with you from here on out.

Sincerely,
Sarah Green