

Mayor supports Chief McLay's embrace of anti-racism message

City police union president objects to chief's appearance in social media and effect on officer morale

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By Michael A. Fuoco / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

<http://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2015/01/04/Mayor-supports-Chief-McLay-s-embrace-of-anti-racism-message/stories/201501030134>



Pittsburgh Police Chief Cameron McLay on New Year's Eve, holding a sign offered by the local activist group What's Up?! Pittsburgh. The photo was widely circulated on social media. Photo by What's Up?! Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto was at home with his girlfriend on New Year's Eve when he glanced at his smartphone and saw a Facebook posting of a photograph of Police Chief Cameron McLay holding a sign reading "I resolve to challenge racism @ work. # end white silence."

"I thought, 'What a great way to begin the new year,' " the mayor said, and he showed his girlfriend the photo. It had been taken by activists from [What's Up?! Pittsburgh](#), who approached the chief in a coffee shop during the city's First Night festivities and asked him pose with their sign.

So pleased was Mayor Peduto with his new police chief's action that he quickly posted the photograph on his own Facebook account, adding his support to restoring trust between the police bureau and the communities it serves, a stated goal of Chief McLay.

"I thought there was very little chance for someone to say this was the wrong message to send," Mr. Peduto recounted Saturday.

He was wrong.

The photo, which continues to be shared on social media, has drawn cheers from numerous groups and individuals, but Fraternal Order of Police President Howard McQuillan isn't among them.

KDKA-TV quoted him Friday as saying the photo amounted to the chief labeling the police force as racist. And in an email to the chief, obtained by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Officer McQuillan wrote that the chief's actions raised "serious concerns. ... By Mayor Peduto labeling us 'corrupt and mediocre' and now our current Chief insinuating that we are now racist, *merely by the color of our skin* and the nature of our profession, I say enough is enough!"

Moreover, Officer McQuillan accused the chief of violating the bureau's social media policy and of being "hypocritical" for disciplining two officers who violated it.

In response, Chief McLay sent an email to the entire bureau Friday with the subject line "Race and Police" in which he apologized "if any of my PBP family was offended," adding "I saw no indictment of police or anyone else in this sign."

The story broke nationally Saturday when MSNBC reported the controversy on its website.

In an interview yesterday, Mr. Peduto said he found “the reaction of the FOP inappropriate — in its tone and message and also trying to say there is something nefarious in trying to end racism.”

The mayor said he had no plans to discuss the issue with the FOP any time soon because the Law Department would have to deal with Officer McQuillan’s emailed allegations that Chief McLay had violated bureau social media policy.

“Right now, the FOP has sent a formal complaint to the chief, so we’ll let the legal procedure around that occur if there needs to be any. We’ll respect that part of the request. But anybody who would look at this, it would seem that what the chief was doing was working to restore the bond between the bureau and the people.

“There was absolutely nothing that would make it seem to be negative against the men and women of the police bureau. Once the smoke has cleared, I will call upon the FOP to join Chief McLay and the rest of city government in acknowledging we all have a role in ending racism in Pittsburgh.

“Racism is against the law,” he added. “The police chief’s job is to uphold the law. Basically, he was saying he would do all he can to make sure the law is equitably enforced in 2015. I can’t see why anybody would be upset with that.”

In his email to the bureau’s officers, Chief McLay wrote: “The sign indicated my willingness to challenge racial problems in the workplace. I am so committed. If there are problems in the PBP related to racial injustice, I will take action to fix them.

“To me, the term ‘white silence’ simply means that we must be willing to speak up to address issues of racial injustice, poverty, etc. In my heart, I believe we all must come together as community to address real world problems; and I am willing to be a voice to bring the community together.

“I saw no indictment of police or anyone else in this sign, but I do apologize to any of you who felt I was not supporting you; that was not my intent.”

He noted that “the reality of U.S. policing is that our enforcement efforts have a disparate impact on communities of color. This is a statistical fact. You know, as well as I, the social factors driving this reality. The gross disparity in wealth and opportunity is evident in our city. Frustration and disorder are certain to follow.

“The predominant patterns of our city’s increased violence involves black victims as well as actors. If we are to address this violence, we must work together with our communities of color.”

He said the bureau needs to acknowledge that reality and “we will be engaging in training to refine our policing efforts in the near future. In the mean time, simply approach your job mindfully, with a continued motivation to protect and serve.

“Please beware also, race impacts how we view one another, and unconscious bias applies to how we deal with the public. It can also impact how we judge one another; I intend we will confront both through training.

“I support your efforts to keep our communities safe, and will back your best efforts to do so. I trust and have faith in you. I also support efforts to improve and restore the communities’ perceptions of justice. The next time you see me engaging in discussions supporting social justice, please remember, we are all guardians of the Constitution. This is the mission we all took an oath to uphold.”

He closed by apologizing again if anyone was offended and said he will be visiting all zones and work units in the coming weeks “to allow opportunity for open discussion, and look forward to being able to talk these tough issues through.”

For his part, Officer McQuillan told the chief in his email that there is a “continued lack of morale” in the department that is not being dealt with.

“I fully understand it is your responsibility to build and restore community trust that the media and the politicians continue to destroy on a daily basis, but you also need to build that same trust and fix our morale issue among the rank and file within our department,” he wrote.

“Pandering to the community at the expense of the police community is not going to get us anywhere. But, by actually recognizing the true needs and working on them together, both of our missions can and will be successful.

“I respectfully request that you put your officers and this department first and truly fix the real problem, which is our collective morale issue. In turn, we will be the professionals we have always been, and will continue to work with the good people of the communities that we live in and work with in on a daily basis.”

Text of email from Chief Cameron McLay to Bureau of Police

January 4, 2015 12:10 AM

From: McLay, Cameron

Date: Friday, January 2, 2015

Subject: Race and Police...

To: Bureau of Police

It appears my having been photographed with a sign supporting racial justice at work and "white silence" has offended some. If any of my PBP family was offended, I apologize. You are very important to me and I would never hurt you purposefully. Let me explain the back story:

I stopped at a coffee shop at First Night, and ran into the group seeking people of all races to join the discussion about racial inequality and injustice. We spoke for a few minutes about how implicit, or unconscious bias results in misunderstanding on all sides, and how the need is for dialogue to clear up misunderstanding. They asked for me to take a picture holding a sign.

The sign indicated my willingness to challenge racial problems in the workplace. I am so committed. If there are problems in the PBP related to racial injustice, I will take action to fix them.

To me, the term "white silence" simply means that we must be willing to speak up to address issues of racial injustice, poverty, etc. In my heart, I believe we all must come together as community to address real world problems; and I am willing to be a voice to bring community together.

I saw no indictment of police or anyone else in this sign, but I do apologize to any of you who felt I was not supporting you; that was not my intent.

The reality of U.S. policing is that our enforcement efforts have a disparate impact on communities of color. This is a statistical fact. You know, as well as I, the social factors driving this reality. The gross disparity in wealth and

opportunity is evident in our city. Frustration and disorder are certain to follow. The predominant patterns of our city's increased violence involves black victims as well as actors. If we are to address this violence, we must work together with our communities of color.

We, the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, need to acknowledge how this reality feels to those impacted communities. Crime and disorder take us to the disadvantaged communities, which are predominantly those of color. The disparities in police arrest and incarceration rates that follow are not by design, but they can feel that way to some people in those communities.

I know, because I have been there too. My own street drug enforcement efforts were well intended but had an impact I would not have consciously chosen. In retrospect, we should have been far more engaged with those in the communities where we were doing our high-impact, zero tolerance type policing; to obtain the consent of those we were policing.

We will be engaging in training to refine our policing efforts in the near future. In the mean time, simply approach your job mindfully, with a continued motivation to protect and serve.

Please beware also, race impacts how we view one another, and unconscious bias applies to how we deal with the public. It can also impact how we judge one another; I intend we will confront both through training.

I support your efforts to keep our communities safe, and will back your best efforts to do so. I trust and have faith in you. I also support efforts to improve and restore the communities' perceptions of justice. The next time you see me engaging in discussions supporting social justice, please remember, we all all guardians of the constitution. This is the mission we all took an oath to uphold.

Please forgive me if I have offended, as that was not my intent. I will be visiting all of the Zones and work units in the coming couple weeks to allow opportunity for open discussion, and look forward to being able to talk these tough issues through.

In the mean time, thank you for your service!