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NINA MOINI: Leadership is in limbo at the Minneapolis Police Department after the abrupt resignation of former chief, Brian O'Hara. And today, city council members are asking the mayor for more information on the direction of the Department. Council Member, Robin Wonsley, is the lead author of the request to the mayor about MPD's path during this period of change. She joins me now. Thanks for your time and coming back on the show, Council Member Wonsley.

ROBIN WONSLEY: Yes, thank you so much for having me.

NINA MOINI: So what you authored is called a legislative directive, which is basically a formal request for information from Mayor Jacob Frey and his office. Why did you feel this was necessary? Is this a common request like this that someone would make on the council?

ROBIN WONSLEY: Yeah, so legislative directives are common tools that council members have to simply do exactly what you mentioned, request information from the administration, specifically the Frey administration. And that's what we're doing right now. Because there has been a number of red flags about how MPD is operating, especially in light of the chief's very unexpected resignation and the consequences that those red flags and the instability that's happening within the Department-- the impact that has on our residents and how it impacts public safety overall for our residents, as well. And MPD falls under the sole authority of Jacob Frey.

So if we want information about what is happening within this Department, why it's in this pattern of instability, then we have to go to its boss. And that is Jacob Frey. So that's why we brought forward this legislative directive asking for some information on what is Mayor Frey's plans to turn things around after seeing things get so bad within the Department. Because our residents deserve to know, also, what that plan is.

NINA MOINI: What has the communication been like that the council has received about the Department and its future? And what would a more collaborative process look like for you?

ROBIN WONSLEY: Yeah, so what I do know is many of us learned about the former chief, Brian O'Hara's, resignation through media and did not know the extent of allegations being made behind them. And we were in the dark of that and had to learn from looking online, like many of our residents, about what had happened with a key public safety leader at our city. And from that, we have not had any formal briefings from the mayor's administration or the mayor himself around, what are we doing next? Immediately after former Chief O'Hara's resignation, we saw the appointment of Katie Blackwell as acting chief. And then several days later, that changed to a different individual, the current interim police chief.

NINA MOINI: Bill Peterson.

ROBIN WONSLEY: Exactly, Bill Peterson. And now we're getting word that there are significant organizational changes happening under an interim chief, which begs the question, why would we let someone in a short-term position make such lasting decisions about how the Department is going to be shaped, especially when we haven't fully grasped, what are the actual key issues that allowed the Department to get into this place in the first place? So there are so many outstanding questions and, again, glaring red flags that have not been accounted to.

There's been no formal process to bring council along in understanding why decisions are being made, what decisions are being made and how to, then, relate that to our residents. And I will name a really important example-- for me, as someone who led the budget amendment for the formation of a non-fatal shooting task force so that we can help keep our community safe from gun violence, we actually saw the formation of a task force that was delivering great outcomes, solving non-fatal shootings at higher rates than they had been in the previous decade. And then I learned from a colleague that the leader within MPD, who was brought in from out of state to oversee that work, had been fired. And I believe they only had been with the Department for not even two months at that time.

And they were delivering great outcomes in an issue that impacts our residents. And now it's unclear, how are we actually going to support that work and keep reducing gun violence? So those abrupt decisions have such tremendous impact on our residents. And we need a full plan on how we're actually providing stability within this Department and not having hasty decisions being made.

NINA MOINI: You're wanting, it sounds like, more transparency about any changes in high-ranking positions. Your request also includes information about any potential changes to overtime policies, given the Department went millions of dollars over budget and overtime. Also, the Department is still under this court-ordered police reforms. How do you hope those reforms continue and are carried out under these leadership changes?

ROBIN WONSLEY: Well, I think that's a separate conversation itself that we're going to be having. Because our most recent report from our independent evaluator showed that we are not making good progress on meeting the number of reforms that's required in our settlement agreement. We are doing really bad in that area.

So that's a whole other issue of, again, we just do not have great leadership taking place within MPD that's allowing overspending to happen by the tens of millions. We're not meeting the requirements of our settlement agreement or consent decree. And then we're seeing chiefs turn over and in very questionable circumstances.

And all of these things happened, though, under the executive, Mayor Frey. So that is why we're going to the boss himself and say, give an account for how are we addressing these issues. Also, how are we addressing issues within off-duty, the vehicle in which MPD officers are able to engage in side gigs, but taxpayers subsidize that.

And we saw that come out as a red flag in the fallout from the chief's resignation. How are you also going to make sure we're addressing our investigations process so that people feel confident to be able to report misconduct when it's happening amongst officers and don't have to fear retaliation? We don't have any sense of what Mayor Frey's plan is in addressing those things.

And most importantly, what is the process for selecting a new chief then-- and one that we're bringing in that is meeting high standards, that does not engage in misconduct behavior, that will not encourage fellow officers to do the same, that's promoting officers to come in and exhibit the highest quality behavior in a way that keeps our residents safe and acknowledge and honor their dignity and humanity. And questions around, can we actually find that within our current Department? I know there's conversations around, are we looking to promote from within MPD? One thing we have seen-- some of the best candidates we've seen who have been able to move, transformative work around our public safety often have come from out of state, as well.

NINA MOINI: Are you thinking that-- do you have a timeline at all for selection of a new permanent police chief? I know Mayor Frey has expressed that he has a lot of confidence in First Precinct Inspector Bill Peterson, who is the person he's named as interim chief. The Police Union has come out in great support of Bill Peterson-- not saying that he's going to be the one. But it sounds like you're saying you'd prefer to see someone from outside the Department. Do you have any sense of a timeline for that, either?

ROBIN WONSLEY: No, so the legislative director has asked for Mayor Frey's process. And we've seen him do this before. We've seen him create a task force. And from my understanding, there might be interest in forming another one.

But where council members are reflected, where there is thorough community engagement that happens-- I believe the last time we did the chiefs election, they went across South Minneapolis, North Minneapolis, went to targeted areas and had open and transparent, basically, interviews, where community members could ask the finalist questions. It was a robust democratic process. And I think residents really appreciated that. Council members appreciated that.

And right now, I think we would like to see something similar. But there's been no information given to council about what the selection process will be. Will we do a national search? Why are we writing that off the table, those type of things? So that's why we're bringing this directive forward to get those questions answered.

NINA MOINI: All right, Council Member Wonsley. We'll be following as a newsroom the meeting this afternoon, as well, and what information comes out of this. I appreciate your time.

ROBIN WONSLEY: Thank you.

NINA MOINI: That's Minneapolis City Council Member, Robin Wonsley.