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June 20, 2024

Chief Tina Goncalves
Pawtucket Police Department
121 Roosevelt Avenue
Pawtucket, RI 02860

VIA EMAIL AND MAIL

Dear Chief Goncalves:

On behalf of the ACLU of Rhode Island, I am writing in response to the controversy that has arisen over last month's arrest by your department of 83-year-old Pawtucket resident Richard Addison. The dispute over his arrest was memorialized in a May 30, 2024 letter that you sent to the City Council President.

I realize that criminal charges against Mr. Addison are currently playing out in the courts and I do not seek to wade into the contested facts surrounding those charges. However, your May 30th letter does prompt two responses from our organization to which I would ask your attention.

First, your letter defends the arrest by referencing body camera footage evidence that you indicate supports the criminal charges against Mr. Addison. We understand that open records requests seeking access to that footage have been filed with your department. However, we would urge you to promptly release *to the public* that footage, and to do so without the delay often accompanying the formality of Access to Public Records Act requests. The footage, as acknowledged by your letter, is both clearly relevant and technically ready for public review. There are no countervailing privacy interests at issue to delay the release since we understand that Mr. Addison has also sought public release of the video footage.

In recent years, we have seen police departments across the state expeditiously – sometimes within a day or two – release body camera footage of controversial police-civilian encounters in order to promote transparency. It seems to us that this highly publicized incident, made even more public by your letter, similarly warrants prompt release of the video evidence. There is simply no reason to delay its release for the ten – or up to thirty – business days that APRA allows. We hope that you agree.

Secondly, though, we are deeply disturbed by the allegations made in your letter that two officials who advocated on Mr. Addison's behalf – state Representative Cherie Cruz and city councilor Clovis Gregor – “attempted to use their elected positions to gain favor in the police department” when they went to the police station to check on his condition. The only

basis in your letter for this serious allegation of inappropriate political interference is that the two officials provided the police officers on duty with their business cards “indicating who they were and their elected political positions.” Respectfully, having two public officials check on the condition of a constituent who had been arrested after a violent struggle – regardless of who was at fault – and then leaving their contact information is a sign of them doing their job, not a “politically motivated attack.”

While we fully acknowledge your right to criticize these officials, we are concerned by your further attempt to tar them with allegations of “gaining favor” when, by your own account, they did nothing more than seek information about Mr. Addison’s status and leave their business cards so they could be reached. This sort of insinuation hardly seems to be the way for the Department to, in your words, “strengthen ties with our community.”

In any event, as expressed above, the ACLU asks you to release all the video footage of this incident expeditiously. There is no better way to convince Pawtucket residents of the trained professionalism of your department, as emphasized in your letter, than by providing them with the video evidence in your possession.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steven Brown
Executive Director

cc: The Hon. Donald Grebien
Pawtucket City Council
Rep. Cherie Cruz
Richard Addison