



Office of Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey  
*LEADING BOLDLY, WORKING TOGETHER*

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Interim Police Chief Hoey Assumes Leadership of Rockford Police Department**

*Vows to Continue Efforts to Reduce Violent Crime through Effective Partnerships While Maintaining Constitutional Police Practices*

Rockford, IL – Newly appointed Interim Police Chief Patrick Hoey has moved into his new assignment with the Rockford Police Department with a sense of respect for the accomplishments of his predecessor, Chet Epperson. The retired chief's work to move the department towards more modernized policing techniques will serve as Hoey's roadmap over the next several months while the Fire and Police Commission search for a permanent chief.

Interim Chief Hoey, speaking from the podium at Chief Epperson's retirement party, thanked the Chief for the work he has done and the clear path he has defined as the department moves forward in its move to geographic policing. "I have just returned from a ten-week training at the FBI Academy and I was proud to say to my fellow participants while I was there, that everything they are talking about doing, we have already done. We have put programs into place that the federal government is just talking about requiring, and we have built better relationships with our minority and marginalized communities because of our continuous proactive outreach and communication."

Since the shooting death of an unarmed civilian in Ferguson, Missouri, and subsequent officer-involved shootings across the country, outcries for police reform have rocked police departments everywhere. Some are referring to this 2015 spike in violent crime as the "Ferguson Effect," a result of officers' refusal or hesitancy to engage due to potential community and media scrutiny, disciplinary action and litigation.

“It has been stated many times and bears repeating, the violent crime rate in this city is unacceptable,” said Mayor Morrissey. “While the City of Rockford would agree that there is a new, very focused national recognition that police departments must balance the needs of addressing violent crime against the need to follow the requirements of the Constitution, we do not believe that this focus hampers our ability to respond to violent crime. The facts support a contrary conclusion.”

“As a result of the department’s efforts in 2014, we had our lowest recorded rate of use-of-force instances and complaints against the department for excessive force,” said Hoey. “That same year, moreover, violent crime was down approximately 9.45 percent as compared to the previous year.”

In 2015, the city’s violent crime rate has increased while use of force reduction efforts have remained the same. Of the total violent crime incidents, 25 to 30 percent of the city’s violent crime rate is domestic violence related. Furthermore, Winnebago County has the fifth highest rate of child abuse and neglect in the State of Illinois, and the highest of counties over 200,000 people.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, being abused or neglected as a child increases the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 59 percent, as an adult by 28 percent, and for a violent crime by 30 percent according to one study that looked at more than 1,500 cases over time.

“Much has been discussed about the recent Department of Justice study that compared Rockford’s violent crime rates to other select Illinois counties. However, when you look at similar selective statistics, like child abuse and neglect, children living in foster care, deep childhood poverty, and teen pregnancy, the comparable counties are strongly consistent and corollary to the violent crime rates for each county,” Mayor Morrissey stated.

Hoey continued, “We are certainly concerned about the city’s low arrest and clearance rates in comparison to other communities; however, we have no reason to suspect the data is due to or related to a reluctance of our officers to engage aggressively due to the risk of their conduct being called into question. In fact, there is a strong argument to be made that our inability to make certain arrests and clear cases has much more to do with a lack of cooperation with potential credible witnesses and a consequential refusal to receive charging authorization from the State’s Attorney’s Office. Our ability to obtain an arrest warrant and criminal charges is a joint effort between our detectives and the State’s Attorney’s Office.”

City Administrator Jim Ryan added, “As a community, we have to do some root cause analysis. Fundamentally, we have a structural and compounding problem of concentrated poverty and concentrated low educational attainment, and perhaps most importantly, we have a concentrated population of people with major mental health conditions, strikingly so amongst our youth,

adolescents, and young adults. As these individuals grow older, the problem compounds as they repeat the cycle while having their own families.”

The city is collaborating with other law enforcement agencies, faith-based organizations, community groups and social service agencies to continue to improve both its credibility with the community and violent crime prevention efforts, and is also working with federal partners to get technical assistance to examine how to improve clearance rates with respect to violent crime.

“We are at a critical time of transition. While we have introduced many positive reactive interventions after a crime is committed, we are not going to solve our crime problem by simply adding more police or putting more people in jail. Until we comprehensively address the systemic issues within the community, we will continue to have a higher violent crime rate than comparable communities. Mental health intervention and family case management is critical in order to tackle this problem. We need rapid intervention in this population in order to dramatically improve the problem,” said Hoey.

“The research reiterates the critical need for a collaborative approach between law enforcement partners and social service agencies to combat the issue of violent crime. We will continue to work to improve our approach. Many of our interventions implemented to date have been noted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority as a best practice in fighting violent crime while respecting civil rights and the Constitution,” Morrissey concluded. “This is a call-to-action to the community. We can no longer simply call this a crime issue. Our violent crime statistics indicate multiple aspects of community health; social, psychological and economic; one that demands the collaboration of the entire community to solve.”

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