



June 4, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

My family had a wonderful visit to PVD Fest yesterday, and I hope your weekend is bringing you much joy as well, either downtown or elsewhere. This week's letter discusses the Providence Community Police Relations Act and "good government" reforms.

At its June 1 meeting, the City Council gave final passage to the Providence Community-Police Relations Act (PCPRA). As I explained in [Remarks](#) at the meeting, the amendments validated my vote last month to postpone (or "lay on the table") final passage until a working group could consider the concerns of Police Chief Clements. The working group produced amendments that gained the Chief's support of the entire program, which in turn provided the basis for my favorable vote. With that said, Chief Clements will have challenges in implementing the PCPRA. Within the Police Department, some rank and file officers remain opposed, and he will need to exercise leadership to bring about the prescribed changes. We are fortunate to have the leadership of Chief Clements (who has won national recognition for both the Department as a whole and his own work in leading it) so I am optimistic he will meet this important challenge.

It also is my hope we now can move beyond some of the anger that descended upon City Hall over the past few months. The mainstream of dialogue I had with constituents was constructive, discussing the PCPRA as a way for government to improve the lives of citizens. I am grateful for your feedback and input. Others, however, took a darker view of the process. As reported in the [Providence Journal](#), one of the organizers (who led a rally at City Hall that disrupted Thursday's City Council meeting) made the point that "no elected official can take credit for this," suggesting a more adversarial approach to City government. I saw this in my own mailbox and social media, where in the weeks following my vote to table, I received a stream of critical and blunt messages stating (1) my vote on this issue was the only thing that mattered to them during my term of office, and (2) I would be sorry if I failed to meet their expectations. After the City Council's (and my) vote in favor, the communications ceased, as only a single person contacted me to acknowledge our role. Similarly, many activists who called me in the days leading up to the meeting did not want to end the conversation upon learning that I was planning to vote in favor, instead also (unsuccessfully) demanding that I admit that the Providence Police Department was a fundamentally racist institution. Their position matched the original sponsors' [Preamble](#) to the PRCPA which (before the City Council removed it) began the bill with a vigorous denunciation of the Providence Police Department. These sponsors and organizers told me they viewed the City Council as an instrument of power, their advocacy and pressure as a way they could seize that power, and the PCPRA as a way to use their power to vanquish the Police Department. Now that the PRPCA has passed, these sponsors and activists can (and hopefully will) direct their energy towards more constructive engagement with government for the good of the City and police-community relations.

At a public hearing last Tuesday, and at the June 1 City Council meeting, I continued to press "good government" and ethics reform legislation to respond to the crisis generated by the felony indictments of the two top City Council leaders over the past year. This remains a difficult issue for some (for example, members of the crowd supporting the PCPRA hissed when I discussed the topic of "good government" at Thursday's City Council meeting), and my colleagues on the City Council are not embracing the legislation with a sense of urgency or alacrity. Despite this unpopularity with some, I will continue my advocacy because I believe it is essential to restoring the public's trust in the City Council after its top two officers (each of whom had a long history of violating the campaign finance laws) were indicted on campaign finance-related felony charges during the past year. This sorry record fed the dark views that were expressed over the past several months, and also promoted the conclusion of City residents, businesses and State officials that the City Council is broken. With that said, others are opposing reform. Some City Council members would prefer to view the issue as having been limited to two members, and question the need for legislation to guard against future abuses. Also, the American Civil Liberties Union argued that indicted Council members should retain their officer positions as part of a presumption of innocence, viewing the positions as the private property of the Council members rather than as a public trust conferred by the City Council as a whole. In short, it has been and continues to be a difficult road to reform, but I will not let the resistance and cynicism shared by some to deter me from this important task.

Sincerely,