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For Immediate Release

Statement from the Battery Park Protest:
Burlington City Council Passes Resolution to Remove Violent Officer
Jason Bellavance

Monday September 21st, 2020

On Monday, September 21st, 29 days into the Battery Park Protests, City Council passed a [Resolution to remove violent officer Jason Bellavance from the Burlington Police Department](#) (BPD), and in so doing took the first step in meeting the demands of the Battery Park Protests.

As the City of Burlington celebrates the removal of violent officer Jason Bellavance from the BPD, we must acknowledge that this Resolution **is the direct result of the power of the people.**

Starting on the evening of August 25th, a group of BIPOC leaders and supporting allies began a 24/7 protest in Battery Park in response to Jacob Blake's violent shooting by the Police in Kenosha, Wisconsin. From Day 1 our demands were clear: fire violent officers Jason Bellavance, Corey Campbell, and Joseph Corrow; Release all body camera footage from the Burlington Police Department and make it freely available to the Public; Defund the Burlington Police Department, and instead fund healthcare and housing for all. Since then, we have remained committed to these demands, and have held daily rallies at the BPD and Marches across the City, largely through the Church Street Marketplace, Burlington's economic center and to City Hall, the center of local government. Our Movement grew with hundreds marching in the streets and many more supporting from afar by providing hot meals, calling into City leadership supporting our demands, hosting training and programming the park, and fundraising to cover citations or bail that might be incurred as we raise our voice for Justice and accountability.

On September 8th, two weeks into our demonstrations, City Council called an Emergency Meeting to address our demonstrations and demands. That night, Council passed a Resolution [Regarding Protesters and Public Safety](#). While this Resolution held critical language regarding amending the City Charter which grants sole authority of Police oversight and discipline to the Chief of Police, it did not go far enough. It did not address our demands to remove violent officers Jason Bellavance, Corey Campbell, and Joseph Corrow and therefore did not address our call to protect the immediate safety of BIPOC and other traditionally marginalized people in our community. And so we kept going, protesting daily, providing a system of Mutual Aid in Battery Park, and demonstrating what a new system of public safety and care that serves all people.

On the night of September 21st, 29 days into our Protest, City Council voted to pass a critical Resolution approving a settlement agreement to remove violent Officer Jason Bellavance.

In the Resolution, “Approval of Separation Agreement For Jason Bellavance”, the City Council has acknowledged the incidents of police brutality perpetrated by BPD officer Bellavance against residents of Burlington. These incidents occurred years ago and were inadequately addressed by the Police Chief at the time, a time in which Mayor Weinberger was already leading our city government. The very proposition of this Resolution signals City leadership had previously recognized Bellavance’s use of force to be wrong, and are only now taking the right disciplinary action by having him removed from Burlington Police Department.

In this same Resolution, City Leadership also acknowledges the violent actions of officers Joseph Corrow and Cory Campbell yet do not propose a solution to address these wrongs. While City Leadership search for the words: “FIRE” or “RESIGN”, violent officers Corrow and Campbell are still armed and patrolling Burlington’s streets with the same capacity to brutalize, permanently disable and even kill Burlington residents without provocation or consequence.

The very fact these officers have not willingly resigned, even without government intervention or public pressure, is in itself a sign that the Burlington Police Department fosters a sick culture where an officer’s desire to keep their badge is worth risking the safety and wellbeing of all Burlington residents. Interim Chief Murad’s explicit choice to *defend* the department’s past mistakes rather than to listen to the needs and perspectives of the thousands of individuals who have shown up to support this Movement, is in itself evidence that these three violent officers are the just the tip of a much larger iceberg. There is a clear lack of leadership in the broken BPD. Murad is the fifth interim Police Chief since former Chief Brandon del Pozo left the Department after harassing Burlington residents on social media. There are serious issues in the BPD. **The removal of all three officers that are publicly known to be violent from the Department is the very least of what should be done to protect all people in our community** and signal a serious change in standards.

Let all of Burlington understand that this new Resolution and the settlement with Officer Bellavance is another incremental step toward Justice and Police accountability.

We believe that the City Council and Mayor Weinberger are capable of more. Burlington residents deserve assurance that the Burlington Police Department and our elected officials do not tolerate police brutality and excessive force. **We deserve leaders who are willing to go forward in unprecedented ways to set new standards that will prevent acts of police brutality in the future, and who will create opportunities for BIPOC and other traditionally marginalized groups to thrive.** The removal of one violent officer is an important first step, but it is not nearly enough. We will continue to raise our voices and resist the current corrupt system until all violent officers are removed, until we have a new mechanism for Police oversight and discipline, until we create a new public safety apparatus that serves *all* people, until we stop criminalizing houselessness in our community, until we have dismantled systemic racism in this City.

We are not going anywhere. Our fight has only just begun.