

The Town of
Weaverville
NORTH CAROLINA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**TOWN RESPONSE TO BUNCOMBE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS JOINT STATEMENT
REGARDING RACIAL BIAS AND EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE**

Weaverville, April 9, 2018 – The Town Manager and Police Chief, with the endorsement of Mayor Al Root, release this response to Buncombe County Commissioners’ Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, Al Whitesides and Ellen Frost joint statement regarding racial bias and police use of force.

Town leaders were taken aback by the inclusion of our Town and other municipalities in this joint statement. We believe it to be futile to enter into any conversation when emotional enlistment, hyperbole and nebulous overstatements may be deliberately employed as the foundation for a debate. In such a framework, it seems impossible to have the open dialogues, honest assessments or collaboration across agencies as called into action by the three Commissioners. Per Weaverville Town Manager Selena Coffey and Police Chief Alan Wyatt, “We take it as a personal affront when our Town, the officers of our Police Department and the law enforcement profession are identified as a de facto element contributing to the ‘crisis in the community’. We do not deny the disturbing and discouraging realities of the August incident and the events that followed within the City of Asheville. However, we will not be coerced into taking any immediate, universal actions to address a crisis if one has not been shown to exist within our Police Department and Town”.

In direct response to the elements of the joint statement issued by the Buncombe County Commissioners, we issue the follow statements:

The Weaverville Police Department policies were reviewed and audited in the summer of 2017 by the North Carolina League of Municipalities and their report was presented to Town Council on July 17, 2017 by Tom Anderson, who is the NCLM Law Enforcement Risk Manager. In his report to Town Council, Chief Tom Anderson recognized the Weaverville Police Department for their impressive work in law enforcement and for completing the risk review process. The risk review process (a voluntary process, requested by former Chief Greg Stephens), included approximately 40 high-risk categories, including the use of force, supervisory training and pursuits. Mr. Anderson noted that he was ‘proud to say that the Weaverville Police Department exceeded many of these categories expectations’. Chief Anderson personally thanked Police Chief Greg Stephens and then Detective Alan Wyatt for their commitment through this process. The Town’s efforts in requesting and completing this voluntary risk review process are truly indicative of the Town’s and the Weaverville Police Department’s efforts to ensure the public’s safety and fair treatment and our highest professional standards. It should be noted that the NCLM’s risk review process is modeled after the industry standards and best practices as addressed in the *Final Report to the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing*.

With regard to Buncombe County's offer to fund training for use of force, de-escalation and implicit bias, we assert that training is always welcome within the Weaverville Police Department. However, any training conducted for the Weaverville Police Department must meet the North Carolina Department of Justice standards. We will continue to use our current training mechanisms that are in place and available regarding use of force, de-escalation and all other areas of law enforcement training.

Regarding the County's funding of a multidisciplinary 'Use of Force Response Team' within county government, the Town recognizes that there may be positive impacts for some of these elements for those agencies who wish to utilize them, but do not see the need for this pilot team in the Town of Weaverville. This applies to the County's creation of a Human Rights Commission as well. The Town of Weaverville wholeheartedly agrees that all people shall be treated with dignity and respect.

In response to Buncombe County's proposal to fund programs to create trauma-informed responses to use of force incidents by law enforcement agencies, the Town of Weaverville emphasizes that the Weaverville Police Department already has programs in place to effectively meet these needs.

Finally, with regard to collaboration from the District Attorney's Office in developing protocols for requesting investigative assistance from the State Bureau of Investigations, the Town notes that our Police Department's current use of force review policy mandates the inclusion of a law enforcement officer from an external law enforcement agency as appropriate, such as, but not limited to, any investigation of an incident to determine if biased-based policing occurred. This could include the FBI, SBI, District Attorney's office or any combination thereof. This ensures that proper, thorough and unbiased investigations are conducted.

In conclusion, we wish to inform our community that, in over 30 years, our Police Department has received zero formal complaints regarding bias or excessive use of force. The inappropriate use of force has not been tolerated in the past, nor is it now. The Police Department Oath of Office includes the promise to "respect the constitutional rights of all to liberty, equality and justice". After our Officers take this important Oath, it becomes a matter of public trust. While we cannot predict the future or whether we will see the need to implement the tenets set forth in the Commissioners' press release, we can assure our citizens and visitors that we will endeavor to address any perceived or tangible racial discrimination, bias or wrongful treatment in a swift and just manner.

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