

From the Office of the Sheriff:

“Do we need to go there?”

Law enforcement is a vocation that requires you to work under the scrutiny of the public. There is never a shortage of criticism. At the Sheriffs’ Department, we do not get a lot of complaints about our service or the actions of employees. We do have a formal system that allows for the public to file a written complaint. These complaints are taken very seriously and are fully investigated with the original complainant getting a written response as to the outcome of the investigation. This is a great system because it allows us to identify shortcomings and trends so we can adjust and implement corrective action. We do this very well.

Last week, the Joint Finance Committee added language to the states budget that will require that all law enforcement agencies record racial data on each and every traffic stop, even a simple warning. Some legislators must feel there are police agencies guilty of racial profiling. Every citation already reflects the race of the person cited, however, race is not captured when the result is a simple written or verbal warning. Though the drivers license may list race as white, black or Hispanic, we know that our world is filled with many more heritages and ethnicities. This will require officers to ask - “Your race sir/ma’am?” This may be offensive in itself.

The proposed unfunded mandate will require more time, more data recording and a standardized data base at the state level to ensure uniform recording of data collected. I am puzzled with the proposal as I have never heard of any local allegations of racial profiling in Dodge or surrounding counties. I can only assume that it is an issue in southeastern Wisconsin as the legislators who proposed such language are from the greater Milwaukee area. But why impose such mandates on departments and areas of the state that no such allegations exist?

It just seems that the rural areas of the state pay a heavy price to fix issues unique to our Milwaukee friends. The license plate registration sticker is just another. Because they have so many stolen in Milwaukee, let’s eliminate the sticker state-wide! I like the sticker here and I think it would be a mistake to eliminate it. The real rub with the proposal is that it takes the trust and confidence away from Sheriffs’, Police Chiefs and law enforcement supervisors.. Wouldn’t you think that we can manage and supervise our personnel to ensure such racial profiling does not exist? With the data we collect on citations, don’t you think that is enough to identify racial profiling? Apparently not, let’s create more work, more unfunded mandates, and more databases during times when we are struggling to maintain what we have.

Dodge County has a very diverse population as well as significant traffic passing through from the states minority population centers. If there has been racial profiling we would have identified it and taken care of it by now.

I am thinking about going to Milwaukee next week and proposing legislation that regulate farm machinery driving down Water Street. Of course, their response would be they don’t need it because they don’t have any issues with farm machinery in downtown Milwaukee. Exactly! Thanks for listening. tnehl@co.dodge.wi.us.

