

From the Office of the Sheriff:

I pride myself on being available 24/7/365, however, this exposes my family and I to phone calls from citizens' at the most inconvenient times of the day or night. My cell phone number is on my office voice mail, I never complain, as I consider it part of the job. Often I can provide some calm to the caller, make a call or two and resolve the issue before it gets worse, or in many cases agree to disagree with the callers' complaint. I had one such call very early one morning last week.

I answered my cell and listened to a man tell me about how irresponsible one of my deputy's had acted. It seems the callers' wife had just been pulled over for an expired drivers' license and was cited. He felt a warning would have been more applicable. He made his point and I sympathized with him and the situation. It was his next statement which turned the conversation – "I would think you would have better things to do than write tickets for expired drivers' license, why aren't you out there arresting the real criminals." Not the first time I've heard that one!

I credit the man for his passionate support of his wife and all the reasons (excuses) he had for her failing to get to DMV to renew it. We spoke of officer discretion, the most powerful tool we have and the laws in our state that require people to have a valid drivers' license to legally operate a vehicle. Again, "don't you have better things to do, why don't you arrest the people that drive everyday with revoked licenses?" After 15-minutes I could see no resolve via the telephone, invited the man and his wife to my office for further discussion and we ended our call. My next call was to the dispatch center to get more background information on the traffic stop.

I quickly learned the deputy was made aware the registered owner was operating on an expired drivers' license. This is probable cause to conduct a traffic stop and inquire as to who is driving. The callers' wife was in fact driving on an expired license. She was also in violation of the proof of insurance law and given a written warning for that violation. A courtesy call was made to her husband to allow him to pick her up and retrieve the vehicle.

I called the man back and explained I felt the deputy acted professional and used great discretion. She received a warning vs. citation for the proof of insurance violation and we called him to provide opportunity for him to pick up his wife and vehicle. When I would have thought I would have heard some appreciation for the discretion used I got - "well I guess you must need the money if you're writing those tickets, is the money that important?" At that point I realized no matter what I said or any explanation I had would appease this man. I am sure his three OWI convictions and numerous other convictions played a role in his opinion of law enforcement.

The bottom line is this. We teach our children to accept responsibility, how can we expect it if we do not accept it as adults. Each of us receive a notice from DMV at least 30-days in advance to renew. Yes, it may be time consuming to stand in line; consider it the price we pay for driving privileges. What was frustrating about the call is at no time did he hold his wife responsible for her lack of action. He had every excuse why she did not have time to go to DMV. Sir, everyone is busy, for many of us we prioritize our requirements to ensure we get it done. Stand up and take some responsibility, the deputy was doing what you pay him for - doing his job. Thanks for listening, [tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us](mailto:tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us).