



604 C Street ~ Eureka, CA 95501
www.ci.eureka.ca.gov/depts/police

Stephen Watson
Chief of Police

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 17, 2021

Eureka Police Department Chief responds to reports of unofficial officer communications and misconduct

Dear Citizens,

Yesterday afternoon, the Eureka Police Department received a call from a reporter at the Sacramento Bee newspaper who had questions about a text message exchange between officers that reportedly occurred between January and August of 2020. At the time of that call, neither I, nor my public affairs staff was aware of the material that he referenced, so we asked for copies of the materials to be sent to our department and the reporter obliged.

Upon learning the details of the content in these reported communications, I, like you, was deeply saddened and disturbed. While the exchange that reportedly occurred between officers was something that appears to have taken place on private devices, the subject matter discussed professional duties and was profoundly upsetting.

As Chief of Police, I am deeply concerned with any allegation of behavior that calls into question the professionalism of our officers, who are hired, trained, and trusted to serve and protect the public interest. The kind of attitudes and behavior exhibited in the transcript I saw did not and do not reflect the values and standards of the EPD.

As you may or may not know, this department has taken many steps over the last several years to train and support our officers while strengthening our commitment to the community we serve. What has been reported, unequivocally, does NOT meet the professional standards to which we hold our public servants.

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While the investigation into the veracity of these reports is still underway, and every person is entitled to due process, the accusations are serious enough that this morning my leadership team and I placed two officers who have been reported to have made these statements on administrative leave. This leave is effective immediately and any change of status will be evaluated pending deeper review of this critical matter. At my direction, this investigation will be conducted by an independent, outside investigator.

We have worked hard together these past several years to create a community-service oriented culture, and to build positive relationships with all members of our community based on committed partnership, mutual understanding, trust and respect.

As Chief, I have also made it one of our department's top priorities to focus on the high standards our profession demands. Over the past four years, we prioritized providing our officers training on implicit bias, procedural justice, racial and cultural diversity, de-escalation techniques, and crisis intervention team training. We have also emphasized outreach and services over enforcement to those experiencing homelessness—an approach that stresses building relationships and collaboration within our homeless community and service providers through our innovative Community Safety Engagement Team (CSET) and Mobile Intervention and Services (MIST) programs.

Today, I feel compelled to state the obvious. The attitudes reflected in the text messages that were shared with us yesterday, do not mirror this training. They do not demonstrate the positive changes we have worked so hard to reach and they do not meet my personal performance expectations for this department. Transparency and accountability are required in the positions we fill, and you have my word that we won't rest as we keep working to achieve the standard our community expects.

On behalf of the many men and women of law enforcement who honorably protect and serve their communities every day, in Humboldt County and across our nation, I seek your support as we do everything in our power to earn and keep your trust.

While we leave room for the investigation to reveal more information, we also fully denounce the content of the communications that have been reported. And, we respectfully ask you to join us in doing the same. This is, in my opinion, the only right way forward.

In service,

Chief Watson

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Media Release Prepared by: Chief Steve Watson



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