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EDITOR'S PICK

## Noting Mayor Paul Soglin's silence, Madison alders release statement on East Towne Mall arrest

ABIGAIL BECKER | The Capital Times | abecker@madison.com | @abecker\_4 Jun 23, 2016



PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

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People gather outside the Dane County Public Safety Building in downtown Madison during a Wednesday rally protesting the arrest of 18-year-old Gerele Laird.

Compelled by the lack of a response from Mayor Paul Soglin to what some call a "brutal" arrest of an 18-year-old black woman at East Towne Mall Tuesday and a widely circulated video of the incident, 11 Madison City Council members released a statement to the community Thursday afternoon.

In the letter they said the arrest of Genele Laird and the video of it showed a tendency to take an "either-or" position, that either Laird or the responding officers must be wrong. They argue both can be true.

"However, we cannot disregard the power imbalance between a young person and trained law enforcement officers," the alders wrote.

Additionally, the statement expressed support for the Madison Police Department and noted that this event does not signify that the MPD "trains officers to use that level of aggression," but also recognized an increasing lack of trust, specifically among communities of color and law enforcement.

"Events like this do affirm and deepen an existing lack of trust between people of color and the police department," the statement said. "They affirm that the community has the right to know the training, policies, procedures and culture of our police department."

Finally, the alders say the event affirms the need for a comprehensive review of the police department, which the City Council approved June 7 at a heated meeting.

"We stand committed in continuing our involvement in the development of trust and understanding among all members of our community and the Madison Police Department," the statement said.

Alders who signed the statement include:

- Ald. Matt Phair, District 20
- Ald. Barbara Harrington-McKinney, District 1
- Ald. Ledell Zellers, District 2
- Ald. Amanda Hall, District 3
- Ald. Shiva Bidar-Sielaff, District 5
- Ald. Marsha Rummel, Council President Pro Tem, District 6
- Ald. Zach Wood, District 8
- Ald. Maurice Cheeks, District 10
- Ald. Sara Eskrich, District 13
- Ald. Denise DeMarb, District 16
- Ald. Rebecca Kemble, District 18

Ald. Matt Phair, District 20, said it is difficult for the City Council to respond with one voice and that it is part of the mayor's job to respond to the community.

While many community leaders and activists have spoken out against the arrest, Soglin's voice has been notably absent from reactions to Tuesday's incident and the tense City Council meeting over police department review funding two weeks ago.

Soglin said he has spoken with Madison Police Chief Mike Koval on that matter and advised him to make more "temperate" remarks.

"The spirit of what I said to him was, 'If you are going to offend, do it with substance, not with style,'" Soglin said.

Soglin said Thursday as he was traveling to Indianapolis for the U.S. Conference of Mayors that he is not commenting on the arrest at this time because he wants to review all the details.

"When I return next week, I'll have a statement," Soglin said.

Critics say too much time has passed and that a response from the mayor could help calm frustration in the community over the arrest, which sparked an outcry from Madison's African-American community leaders.

Ald. Sara Eskrich, District 13, said she has been asked by constituents where the mayor stands on this issue and does not know how to respond.

"That really creates a void in our community," Eskrich said.

Ald. Denise DeMarb, District 16, said while a knee-jerk reaction is best avoided, she fears the more time that passes, the greater the community unrest will be.

"(Soglin's) measured response could help to smooth that a little bit," DeMarb said. "What's troubling, of course, is that there has been an outcry from the African-American community and meetings of black leadership and yet there's been no response from the mayor's office."

Community leaders from the Urban League, Boys and Girls Club of Dane County and other local groups have spoken against the involved officers' actions and expressed concern that this incident fosters feelings of mistrust between communities of color and the police department.

"I am outraged to my core," said Ruben Anthony, CEO of the Urban League of Greater Madison, in a statement Wednesday. "The abuse this young woman faced at the hands of these police was savage and excessive."

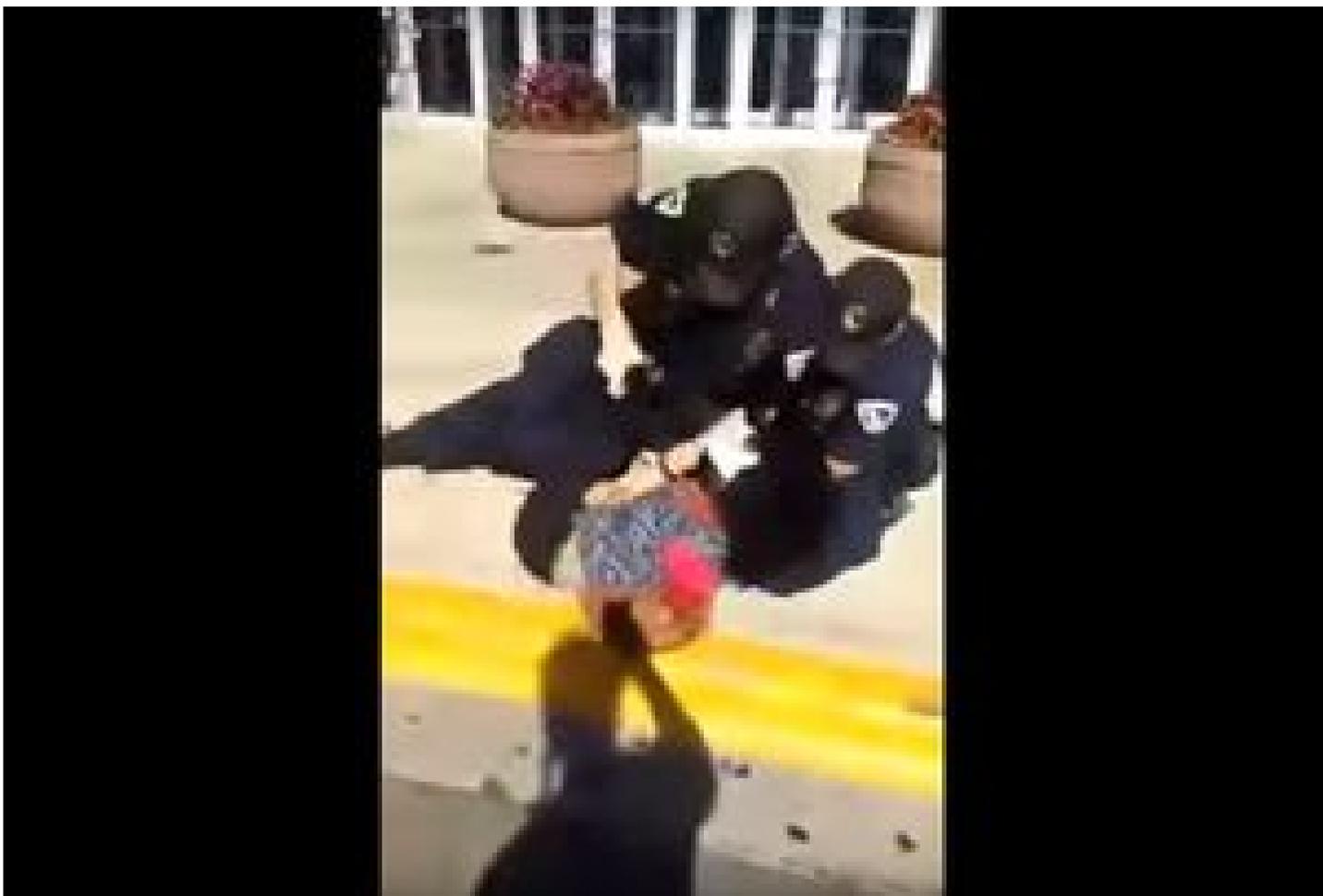
A statement from the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, a black women's community organization released Thursday by Madison365 said the portion of the arrest captured on video represented an "abuse of power" and not what the community considers "quality policing."

"Given the extant tensions between the Black community and the police department and the hard work of various leaders to agree upon appropriate policing, we are mortified at what has transpired," read the statement from the organization, whose president is University of Wisconsin-Madison education professor Gloria Ladson-Billings.

Koval said Wednesday at a press conference that the video does not explain the entire story. The arrest is under review by the MPD's Professional Standards division in addition to an independent investigator from the Dane County Sheriff's Office.



Police Chief Mike Koval: Video of violent East Towne arrest is 'snapshot' of entire incident



Madison Police Chief Mike Koval orders internal review following East Towne Mall arrest

## Abigail Becker

Abigail Becker joined The Capital Times in 2016, where she primarily covers city and county government. She previously worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Wisconsin State Journal.



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