

#xxxx

Sponsor:

**Council
Member
Darby**

WHEREAS, firefighters and law enforcement officers are among the oldest and most critical occupations a municipality needs to maintain functionality. The missions and roles of the Wilmington Fire Department (“WFD” or “Fire Department”) and Wilmington Police Department (“WPD” or “Police Department”) have evolved throughout our City’s history. Both require multifaceted support and evidence-based strategy to ensure that they remain relevant to the concerns of the more than 70,000 Wilmingtonians who rely on them; and

WHEREAS, a growing body of research suggests that our nation’s public safety systems are underequipped with the social and community resources to protect and serve citizens effectively. Serious mental health concerns have placed greater demands on our police force, our firefighters have become frontline workers in the fight against opioid overdoses, and trauma-informed professionals have become essential to addressing community violence; and

WHEREAS, our City’s public safety infrastructure was previously managed by a Public Safety Director. Wilmington once again requires a conscious public safety strategy with a dedicated leader to oversee the process of recruiting and retaining highly-qualified, diverse talent among the ranks of our first responders; administer the policies necessary to ensure that our public safety infrastructure is continually evolving in response to the needs of Wilmington’s communities, and to consistently engage our residents in conversations surrounding how best to secure our neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, administering comprehensive assessments of critical City services, like the WFD, in consultation with external technical experts is an essential element of bolstering critical public safety infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, the Center for Public Safety Excellence’s (“CPSE”) Commission on Fire Accreditation International (“CFAI”) provides a comprehensive evaluation framework for ensuring that the quality of our fire services adheres to industry standards. The CFAI is a voluntary accreditation that demonstrates to the community that a fire department continually self-assesses, looks for opportunities for improvement, is transparent, and holds itself accountable through third-party verification and validation. The CFAI process is thorough, typically requiring three (3) to five (5) years to complete. Approximately 293 fire agencies are currently CFAI-accredited nationwide; and

WHEREAS, the WFD also requires special expertise to increase its capacity to attract and retain diverse candidates who can support the Department in upholding high standards of quality; and

WHEREAS, retention of fire professionals is a nationwide concern, to the extent that it was identified as a key priority by the Department of Homeland Security. Having a dedicated recruitment and retention professional will enable the WFD to not only pinpoint exceptional individuals with the skills for today’s fire emergency needs but also to prepare for future demands of the work. Designating the WFD recruiter role as a mid-level officer position demonstrates a commitment to addressing hiring challenges. The estimated costs of having an individual in the WFD dedicated to recruiting include: the FTE (full-time equivalent) salary of \$65,000 to \$75,000, an additional \$20,000 for benefits, \$3,000 for professional development, and miscellaneous expenses associated with traveling to local and regional career fair events to engage with potential candidates for WFD positions; and

WHEREAS, an effective public safety strategy also hinges on a balanced approach to crime suppression that includes government and community stakeholders working towards

both prevention and intervention. The WPD is just one element of Wilmington's public safety infrastructure, however, their budget has grown by \$2,273,043, a 4.4 percent increase over Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, and by 8.14 percent over the past five years. To ensure that our police are adequately equipped to confront our present contexts, the City of Wilmington must make investments in new tools, strategies, partnerships, and innovations that equip officers with the skills to work in concert with individuals who are embedded in our communities to actualize lasting change; and

WHEREAS, introducing community-driven public safety strategies and making the financial provisions for them to thrive will benefit both the WPD and the residents they serve; and

WHEREAS, as one of the most prominent components of the City's public safety infrastructure, the WPD still has a significant role to play in making a community-driven security strategy a reality. Actions, like placing the financial responsibility for a community review and oversight board and a periodic audit under the scope of the WPD budget appropriations, as opposed to the purview of the Mayor's Office, would demonstrate the Department's commitment to a more inclusive vision; and

WHEREAS, programs like police cadet and auxiliary programs have the potential to provide conduits for citizens to actively contribute to securing our neighborhoods. Not only do these types of initiatives empower residents to become knowledgeable about the policies and protocols of the WPD, but they also allow them to better understand the contexts officers in our City face. These programs are valuable tools for building mutual understanding between civilians and police. Cadets and auxiliary officers are trained to carry out certain law

enforcement duties but do not require the salary and benefits investment equivalent to a full-time police officer, which could result in further cost savings for the City; and

WHEREAS, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding has given the City a rare opportunity to address some of the root causes of crime, however, the short-term economic support it provides is insufficient to fully resolve the long-standing concerns neighborhoods are experiencing. The City of Wilmington has not experienced sufficient decreases in crime to justify continual cost increases in the WPD budget. A graduated reallocation of 1% of the WPD budget per fiscal year, beginning in FY 2024 to alternative public safety measures until a total recurring reallocation of 5% is reached in FY 2029 will provide the resources necessary to explore alternative, evidence-based public safety strategies. A further reallocation of an amount equal to 5% of the WPD budget every year thereafter will ensure that our efforts to maintain a holistic public safety infrastructure will be sustainable for this and future generations; and

WHEREAS, over the past years, WPD has come under scrutiny for issues related to its practices and procedures, lack of diversity, transparency, and accountability to the public. Whether these issues are real or perceived, rebuilding community trust and creating an environment that is conducive to mitigating crime and preventing further violence in our neighborhoods is a collective responsibility that extends beyond the exclusive purview of the WPD. Wilmington's residents need and deserve a public safety infrastructure, with a Public Safety Director at its helm, that leverages the assets of our entire public safety infrastructure, inclusive of our public safety professionals and civilians.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WILMINGTON that this Legislative body is in support of a public safety strategy that is coordinated and led by a Director of Public Safety.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Council urges the Administration to make the necessary financial provisions, in a timely manner, to support the personnel, training, and implementation needs of a modern public safety infrastructure.

Passed by City Council,

ATTEST: _____

City Clerk

SYNOPSIS: This Resolution supports the implementation of an innovative, evidence-based public safety strategy, led by a Public Safety Director. It proposes various measures to ensure that our fire and police services are adequately equipped for today's public safety concerns, that they prioritize community engagement, and that the City works collaboratively to actualize a shared vision of public safety. This resolution also urges the Administration to make financial provisions to support the personnel, training, and implementation needs of a modern public safety infrastructure.