



MINNESOTA SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

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March 11, 2026

Hennepin County Board of Commissioners
Hennepin County Government Center
300 South 6th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55487

RE: Support for Sheriff Witt and Hennepin County's Protectors

Dear Chair Fernando and Hennepin County Commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of the *Minnesota Sheriffs' Association* (MSA), representing the 87 independent offices of the elected Sheriffs across Minnesota. As notably, these are the chief law enforcement officers who have each sworn an oath to protect and serve *every* Minnesotan, in every corner of the state. Today, I write to express our collective support for Sheriff Witt and to ensure that you understand our concerns about the challenges facing her office, both from the community and from your own board.

Our state has been caught in the middle of a politically motivated and emotionally charged environment, and Hennepin County has been at the epicenter. We acknowledge that these are very difficult situations in which there are no easy answers. However, we also know that our protectors are too often caught in the problematic wake and are essential factors to finding positive outcomes.

Sheriff Witt has consistently and successfully navigated the complex operations of her office, while also having to respond to an array of very challenging situations throughout Hennepin County. These situations demand a response, and response comes with a cost. This cost is not due to anyone's oversight, but is intrinsic with large scale events, critical incidents and *any* need for our protectors to keep the peace in our communities. We recognize that the cost of providing these essential services can be significant. We also recognize, because history has demonstrated, that when we do *not* properly respond, support or fund public safety, there is an *even greater* cost and negative impact across our communities.

The community response challenges are difficult enough for public safety professionals. Any additional, or county-imposed, operational challenges would significantly worsen any given situation. This would include any staff hiring restrictions that would only serve to ensure that our hard-working protectors become overburdened and overworked and must also

function under a dark cloud of persecution. This would compromise the safety of our protectors, *and* the public that they proudly serve.

As you have acknowledged, a county board is to set the sheriff's staff allocations and must also set an annual budget that takes into account the duties and responsibilities of the office (Per MSS 387.20). Because the sheriffs are the chief law enforcement officers for the county and bring a wealth of public safety experience, their insights on how to best perform the duties, meet critical mandates and deliver the required services should be paramount. The sheriff's input should reign supreme in those determinations as they are the *only* elected official with actual training, experience and knowledge in the arena.

The Hennepin County Sheriff has an authorized staffing complement of 883 authorized FTE's, but the positions are not adequately funded. In fact, the budget is intentionally set in *deficit* of 72 FTE's for a county imposed "Vacancy factor". This highly unusual budgeting process that intentionally fails to fully fund the authorized staffing levels is not only misleading, but also arbitrary and capricious. With underfunded positions and ongoing community unrest, this process nearly guarantees that a sheriff will need to exceed their budget in order to meet the public safety needs of their communities.

Does Hennepin County set restrictions on your Highway Department to only allow them to plow up to ten inches of snow per year? That is likely *not* the case as it would be ridiculous. Just as the Highway Department *cannot* control the weather, the elected Sheriff cannot control what incidents, or mayhem may arise in the county. However, there is a definitive societal expectation that our protectors *will respond* when called and professionally rise to whatever challenge they are presented with. It is incumbent upon each of us, especially those in elected roles of representing their communities, to show support for our protectors.

Politics should never play a role in public safety. Minnesota embraces this by allowing our elected sheriffs to maintain a non-partisan role. Additionally, the elected sheriffs report directly to the people to further ensure that they are independent. That autonomy allows elected sheriffs to operate with the best interests of their communities in mind, not at the direction of politically motivated representatives. That is a good thing, for all of us.

An elected sheriff must do their best to safeguard their communities while operating highly complex offices and meeting ever-changing societal demands. It is a much easier task, if our protectors have the support of other elected officials and community leaders. To operate in silos or turn our backs on our protectors directly and negatively impacts the safety and security of our neighborhoods, and our families. Those who sacrificially serve and protect our communities deserve our respect and our support.

Recent years have shown us, with clarity, how important community relationships with our protectors are. Those relationships are built through positive interactions and programs, not through "Defund" steps or politically motivated actions. Sheriff Witt has consistently shown that her exceptional heart for service goes beyond anyone's politics, rhetoric or propaganda. In fact, her only agenda appears to be serving and protecting the citizens and

guests of Hennepin County with excellence. I cannot fathom why anyone would choose to turn their backs on such an honorable public servant or the impressive team of professionals that she leads through these challenging times.

The *Minnesota Sheriffs' Association* respectfully urges the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners to *actively* support Sheriff Witt and to assist her efforts to pursue safer communities. We all benefit when our sheriff's operational effectiveness is a priority!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Stuart", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James Stuart
Executive Director / CEO
Minnesota Sheriffs' Association

Cc:
The Honorable Dawanna Witt, Hennepin County Sheriff
National Sheriffs' Association
Major County Sheriffs of America