

Good evening,

I would like to submit the following as my comments as I was not able to fit them all in the allotted time.

"Good evening Madam Chair and Select Board. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Elizabeth Dray and I live on Jason Street. I am a health care advocate for immigrants and refugees, I serve as the Executive Director of the Arlington Teosinte Sister City Project and, most importantly, I have lived here for 18 years and have raised my family here. While there are dozens of things I would like to talk about regarding the town's response and what it should do, I will, instead, focus on what the town did not do.

I think of all the time, energy, noise and money Arlington has put towards avoiding making a racist police officer angry, so that when he returned to the Arlington Police Department (APD), which seemed a given by our Town Manager (TM), the racist officer wouldn't be mad, he wouldn't be disruptive to the APD.

I think of the most important thing that you should have done instead, but you didn't. You should have immediately reached out to Arlington's community members who were threatened by the racist PO, the actual victims. But there was no time, no energy, no noise, no money and no action towards this, nothing. There were no calls to come together as a community and support those who were actually harmed. There were no candle light vigils, no solidarity gatherings at the Town Hall. There was nothing. To this day there has been nothing. Nothing but a shameful silence from each and every one of you. But that silence isn't silence to Arlington's most vulnerable residents and our guests. It is not silence to Arlington's immigrants, residents with black and brown skin, those struggling with addiction and mental health, our LBGTQI+ citizens. It is a loud, clear, and heart-breaking noise telling them that they aren't important, aren't welcome, that they don't matter in this town as much as one angry, white, racist police officer. Your silence is deafening.

The first thing this town should have done, every single one of you here, is reach out. Reach out publicly and personally to the citizens you represent and ask 'How are you?', 'How have these words harmed you?', 'What can I do to make you feel safe?' And I don't mean an on-line survey or waiting for us to come to a televised SB meeting. I mean going to where we are, where we work and play and feel safe and saying 'We are sorry this happened in your community. How can I help?

But all we have heard is silence.

I contrast that to the beautiful, reassuring response of the town and the AHRC to the arson at the Chabad Center for Jewish Living. The Solidarity Gathering at the Town Hall was packed, the harmed community was embraced and held up gently by the community and our town's leadership. The Town Manager spoke, Acting Chief Flaherty spoke. There wasn't enough room on the stage for all the people who wanted to be seen there. Senator Friedman said 'Each day people fight harder and harder to ensure that everyone in our community feels welcome. In trying times such as these we must stick together and support one another. We have to continue

to demonstrate that we are a welcoming and inclusive community.” Her words are beautiful and right.

Yet, in the last 10 months, what similar activities have been held for the immigrants, the LGBTQIA+, those struggling with drug addiction and mental health issues, the black and brown skinned residents of Arlington. Did they get embraced? Held up? Sung to? No, they got silence, deafening silence.

You can not choose who you lift up and who you don’t. You can’t choose whose human rights you defend and whose you don’t, who you embrace and support and who you don’t. But that is exactly what this Select Board, our TM, our Acting chief of Police, and the AHRC has done publicly. You are our elected leaders and you should serve everyone equally. If you can’t do that then you shouldn’t sit in those chairs.

To approve this letter tonight, a letter full of partial truths, untruths and obfuscation is to approve the whole broken process. It is another message that those truly harmed, the actual victims, don’t count. It is a message that you can’t be bothered to put the time in to dig in and really address this situation, that you would rather it, and we, just go away.

I urge you to stop being silent. I urge you to reach out to those who have been actually harmed by Lt. Pedrini and your silence. This is not a onetime thing. It takes time to build trust where there is none. You must establish a relationship. You must have confidential listening sessions in safe, trusted locations using culturally-sensitive interpreters. You must put multi-lingual flyers in schools, bus stops, libraries, and parks. You must do the work.

I urge you to put forth a binding Trust Act. When the Trust Act was put forward in 2017 we asked the SB to make it “binding”. We were told, by some of you who are still on the SB today, that we didn’t need to worry about it because we had Chief Ryan and a very progressive police department. Sadly, the APD of Chief Ryan is gone. We have a racist police officer who is so confident and proud of his racism and position that he publicly proclaimed it for the State of Massachusetts to hear. We have a TM and Acting Police Chief (APC) who call the writings racist in private but do not have the courage to do so publicly. We have an APC who refuses to label Pedrini racist because she has known him 23 years. I firmly believe that if you can’t name it, you can’t even begin to deal with it. We have a TM who has shown no movement in his understanding of why people are upset since I started meeting with him in the Spring. A TM who still thinks that he alone should make the decision of when Lt. Pedrini will be returned to his previous duties and does not understand why bringing in an outside voice to that decision would be appropriate. Sadly, we are a far way from Chief Ryan’s APD. Therefore, I ask you to put forth a binding Trust Act this year. Don’t wait and don’t make us do it. We did it already and we were so successful that it passed Town Meeting 173-19. Your actions have undone it, have broken the Trust Act. It is your responsibility to repair it.

These are two suggestions of small steps, a small amount of noise, that you can make to fill the deafening silence that your actions have left. They are the first steps of the long road back to restoring the trust and Arlington’s reputation.

In that spirit of healing the community, I ask the TM and SB to publicly thank Arlington residents who have spoken out to keeping democracy alive in Arlington. We are owed a thank you for spending countless unpaid hours doing what the SB, TM and APC should have been doing, a thank you for working to repair Arlington's public image and to make Arlington better for all of its residents. Most of all, a thank you for remembering those who were truly hurt when you forgot them.

I will close with this quote by writer, political activist, Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, "What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor but the silence of the bystander." I urge each of you to stop being a bystander and be an upstander. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
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Jason Street
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2 communities, 1 family