

Eau Claire
POLICE
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May 19, 2023

Eau Claire Community Members:

It has been a difficult time for law enforcement in our region. Tragically, three northwest Wisconsin police officers were killed in the line of duty in less than one month's time. On April 8, 2023 Chetek Police Officer Emily Breidenbach and Cameron Police Officer Hunter Scheel were shot to death while conducting a traffic stop involving a suspect with an arrest warrant. On May 6, 2023 St. Croix County Sheriff Deputy Kaitie Leising was shot to death while dealing with a suspected impaired driver. These officers' families and their home communities are mourning these senseless deaths. Our regional law enforcement community is also hurting.

One aspect that connects these terrible events is the routine nature of what these three officers were doing when killed. Every single day Eau Claire Police Officers and all law enforcement officers in our region perform these typical functions, and many more. Whether assisting a stranded motorist, responding to domestic violence or dealing with an active threat involving a firearm, police officers' lives are endangered. Every call for service, traffic-stop and public interaction possesses risk of a tragic outcome.

It is especially poignant that Kaitie Leising's funeral occurred only days before National Peace Officers Memorial Day. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy proclaimed May 15 as National Peace Officers Memorial Day and the calendar week in which May 15 falls, as National Police Week. National Police Week pays tribute to law enforcement officers killed or critically injured in the line of duty, as well as the continued service of all police officers.

Each year, Police Week provides an opportunity to reflect on both the service and sacrifice of Peace Officers. According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, since 1786, almost 24,000 police officers have been killed in the line of duty in the United States. After successive annual declines in the number of officers killed in the 1990's, these numbers are again on the rise. Data collected by the FBI show that assaults and assaults with injuries committed against law enforcement officers are also increasing. The peril of being a police officer is reflected both in these statistics as well as recent local events.

There have been numerous explanations offered for the cause of these troubling trends. One is an increased rate of violent crime being experienced in many communities. Another is the fewer number of active police officers working now in comparison to just a few years ago due to increases in early retirements, resignations to pursue other employment and fewer candidates interested in law enforcement. Other arguments include a rise in social isolation, unmet mental health needs and addiction. It is unlikely the cause of violence committed against police officers is limited to any one of these, or other unstated factor.

Police officers bear great responsibility and great personal risk. In order to protect the public, police officers have the legal authority to arrest, detain, and when necessary use physical force. In other words, police officers have the legal authority to take away someone's constitutionally protected rights and

Chad Hoyord
Deputy Chief

Derek Thomas
Deputy Chief

Kelly Thompson
Administration

Greg Rosno
Communications Center

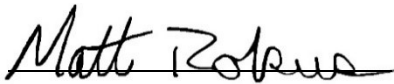
perhaps even a person's life. As a profession we understand and accept the scrutiny that accompanies this authority.

Police officers also need support. Law enforcement is a noble and honorable profession. As a society, we ask a lot of our law enforcement officers. Police officers must respond to the symptoms of complex social issues with courage, compassion and professionalism. Our officers must possess the wisdom and valor to take decisive steps in the protection of themselves, and more importantly other people.

The required scrutiny of policing and the support for this difficult work does not need to be mutually exclusive. As we all try to process the recent loss of these three public servants, we should all consider ways to offer support to law enforcement. This support does not need to be a complex or difficult effort.

Offering your gratitude, appreciation or reassurance to the officers who serve our community goes a long way. Taking the time to learn more about what officers are experiencing and the challenges they face reassures that being a police officer is meaningful. As more people understand the challenges law enforcement encounters, the more people will recognize the importance of recruiting and retaining talented people who possess high ethical standards, and ensuring officers receive necessary training and equipment. Attracting the best people and preparing them to do their important work does not happen without a community's backing.

Your support is needed regardless of how you choose to express it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Rokus". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Matt Rokus
Eau Claire Chief of Police