

Email from Bill Harmening, Tuesday, March 19, 2024, 9:48 a.m.

Hunter, I recently read your column regarding the new BPD policies and the vote to change to an appointed Chief. I just wanted to correct a couple errors in your story. I'm the individual who actually wrote the new policies, and was also the person who completed the BPD evaluation recently.

First of all, the policies are NOT written for an appointed chief. They are written for an elected chief who recognizes that his employees are city employees, not the Chief's employees. So the policies properly include the Mayor and City Board in decisions related to hiring, discipline, firing, and pay. The policies do NOT include the mayor or City Board in any decisions related to policing.

Second, the chief did not file his policies with the Dept of Public Safety, which no department does. The chief did not write his previous policies as he has previously stated, nor did the DPS write them. Those policies were obtained from the McComb Police Department, who purchased them off the shelf from an entity in Texas. I know that because the Chief told me that himself early on when I met with him. I also found an editorial note in the policies (which should have been deleted) that identified the Texas entity. Those policies were never properly configured, were never made consistent with MS law, included policies that violated MS law, and frankly, were dangerous in a number of ways.

The Brookhaven Police Department has many problems, but it also has the potential to be an effective and professional police department. The first step in that process is to have a proper set of policies and procedures that will guide those officers. The chief has a practice of attacking anyone, including me, who criticizes him. My only goal all along was to actually help him rebuilt his department into one the citizens of Brookhaven can be proud of.

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