



Beltrami County Sheriff's Office

PRESS RELEASE

BEMIDJI, MN JUNE 1, 2020: Today I am addressing the rumors and misinformation that are engulfing our community surrounding law enforcement's response to the credible, evidence based threats to the City of Bemidji, its citizens and its businesses that occurred this past weekend. Unfortunately the rumors and misinformation, some shared by public officials, has fueled racial and cultural bias's that we, as government leaders, have worked so hard to eliminate.

On Friday afternoon we learned that the peaceful protests scheduled to take place at the waterfront were being infiltrated by extremist organizations calling for the "burning Bemidji down" with the threat being concentrated on the downtown area. Very early Saturday morning the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office, Bemidji Police Department and Bemidji Fire Department put into motion the necessary steps to protect our community from what happened in the metro. Throughout the day, law enforcement continued to receive threats related to "burning Bemidji down" with threats made directly towards burning down the Beltrami County/Bemidji Police Department law enforcement center. A replication of what took place at the Minneapolis 3rd precinct.

Unfortunately our fears were justified after it was reported to Law enforcement the finding of multiple dumpsters filled with gas accelerants and caches of tools hidden around downtown buildings.

Late in the afternoon the planned peaceful demonstration marched to the law enforcement center and became non-peaceful. Rocks and debris were being thrown at law enforcement center and a police squad car. Law enforcement took immediate action to detain and arrest that subject. The organizers of the peaceful citizen's march were able to step in, calm and dispersed most of the crowd and stopped any more damage from occurring. Following this escalating event the decision was made to board up all first floor windows of the law enforcement center.

Local law enforcement had called for mutual aid from our law enforcement partners across the state. Some that responded were the elected Sheriff's and Chiefs of Police of neighboring jurisdictions. Many of the law enforcement officers that responded and patrolled the streets of Bemidji were doing so in dark SUV squad cars. At no time did the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office or Bemidji Police Department call for private security or citizen's to assist our law enforcement response as it has been stated on several social media platforms and statements made by government officials.

Unbeknownst to myself or Chief Mastin we learned that some business owners, and citizen's, including State Representative Matt Grossell had offered to assist and were with local law enforcement officers and a neighboring Sheriff, at a Bemidji Fire Station.

At approximately 9:30 PM, Representative Grossell reached out to me and offered assistance by being "eyes and ears" for law enforcement. Prior to his call, law enforcement had received information that buses of protesters were coming to Bemidji, so when he asked how he could help, I intentionally directed him outside the city limits to watch for buses that may be coming into Bemidji and report his observations to law enforcement. Unfortunately, miscommunication resulted in some of the "citizens"

placed in fringe locations around the city of Bemidji. These citizen's did not actively patrol city streets, further, we do not share their personal views as they have expressed on social media.

On Sunday, May 31, 2020, Bemidji Police began an investigation after one of the citizen's being the eyes and ears for law enforcement used a social media platform to report what he was doing. Bemidji Police investigated and found that prior to and after the curfew he was with a neighboring Sheriff and local law enforcement officers at this Bemidji fire station. When they were directed away, they left what they thought were the city limits of Bemidji.

The intention of law enforcement leadership is to protect the lives, property and rights of all our citizens and that mission was accomplished.



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