



“Excellence in Police Service”

POLICE DEPARTMENT

222 South Walnut Street • Appleton, WI 54911-5899
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Date: May 6, 2019

To: Safety and Licensing Committee

Re: Truancy Resolution – School Resource Officer’s Feedback

Safety and Licensing Committee Members:

As you all know, I like getting suggestions from the people who are working directly with an issue or problem; the boots on the ground.

I asked our School Resource Officers for their thoughts on the resolution to eliminate the option of a municipal ordinance violation for truancy violations. I’ve attached their comments, without editing, for your information.

Chief Todd Thomas

[Feedback from Current SRO’s on the proposed resolution](#)

“I appreciate the alderpersons thoughts on truancy, but I don’t think eliminating truancy would help a student’s overall success. I think we truly have to take a step back and look at what is best for Appleton’s youth. It is a pretty rare circumstance for a student to be issued a citation for truancy. The majority of students are written citations for habitual truancy; however, there are circumstances that dictate a truancy citation. As a SRO at AWHs, I have written citations for a multitude of truancy related issues. These citations are not written for punitive punishment. They are written to try and curb behavior and give a student a better chance to graduate. These citations are written as a last resort. Once they are written I have seen students change their behavior on multiple occasions. We have also seen these same changes in the behavior of parents. Without the ability to address truancy it will hinder the success of children in our community.”

“It’s a little difficult for me to concisely put into writing my thoughts and feelings on the truancy issue, so I apologize for the ramblings. Being at Central and working everyday with highly at-risk kids, I have seen first-hand the benefits of having truancy enforcement as a tool. Since losing truancy court, I have seen the drop in attendance and grades of some of our students who were on-track when held accountable by the truancy system. This has honestly lead to somewhat of an overall “vibe” that there is little teeth to school rules, and it shows in the kids attitudes.

I currently have 3 ordinance summons sitting open in Tracs for kids I have put on “desk probation” (2 for truancy), essentially adopting the same ideas that were prevalent in truancy court with the end-goal being to get kids to be in school, not necessarily punish. Like any charge in the juvenile system, it needs to be thought out and used as the means to accomplish the greater goal, no different than veterans court, or drug court, or working with the DA’s office on charges to address mental health; it is a way to force a re-direction onto a road or path of change and improvement.”

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“Thank you for reaching out to ask for input in this matter. I heard that this was a possibility, but wasn’t sure if it was fodder or legitimate. In reading your email I realize this is legitimate.

In my opinion dissolving this ordinance would be a huge mistake on the part of the city. This ordinance is not something we rely on heavily, even with the loss of Truancy Court, but it is tool we have. Eliminating this option would further hamper AASD and the city in working with the students enrolled in our schools. We have come to this place because of what I feel are a litany of bad decisions, and feel this would be another bad decision that would compound the issues with in the schools.

Lt. Frisch and the SRO cadre have worked hard to continue the great relationships that the SRO’s before us built within the district. With that we need to have all options available to help us be effective at our jobs. I feel that the statement by the Chief Judge was meant to make an example of how generous Judge McGinnis and the Outagamie County Circuit court Judges have been towards the district, not as a hard and fast statement on the standing of Truancy. If this were the case Truancy wouldn’t be a law in Wisconsin.

At the High School level we are already seeing what the consequences of not having Truancy enforced are. Just in the last week the Dean of Students, and Associated Principal at East were commenting on how the number of pages of students with Truancy issues has multiplied a couple of times over. This is due in part because we as a unit are holding off on issuing Ordinance summons in Truancy matters, while we wait for the school district to work out their plan. Without any enforcement I truly believe that this issue would become worse than it was before Truancy court was started.

Until AASD devises their plan we are basically in a holding pattern. If this ordinance is eliminated we will continue to see a rapid decline in school attendance, and ultimately, a decline in the quality of life in the City of Appleton. I lived this life having grown up in Racine.”

“I agree with Adam. In addition to the points he made, we also have to look at the issue of contribute to truancy which is most prevalent at the elementary school level. Although I have only been in the SRO unit for a year, I have personally seen many instances where the mention of the possibility of a contribute to truancy citation being issued was enough to get parents back on track. Typically this was brought up during the truancy conference to further impress upon the parents the importance of getting their children to school every day. Since we have stopped enforcing the truancy/contribute to truancy ordinances and statutes, I have seen an uptick in the lack of compliance with the law. I have also heard, on many occasions, parents state that they are not making their kids go to school anymore because there are no consequences for them being truant.

I am hopeful that we can continue to educate the community on the necessity of enforcing these laws.”

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