



Wilmington Police Department

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Office of Mayor and Council
929 N Front Street
Wilmington, NC 28401
Sent via email

Dear Mayor Saffo and City Council:

After more than 30 years of dedicated service, I have informed the City Manager that I plan to retire from the City of Wilmington no later than June 30, 2025. Serving this community and leading the employees of the Wilmington Police Department (WPD) has been the greatest honor of my career.

When I accepted the position of Chief in 2020, I committed to a five-year tenure and not staying past 2025. My goal was to guide the department through an era marked by significant challenges, instability, and change. With steadfast focus, I prioritized reducing violent crime and strengthening community trust. Reflecting on this journey, I am proud to say we have made measurable progress in public safety.

Throughout my nearly 35-year career, my journey with WPD has been one of service, growth, and evolution. In 1989, while still in high school, I worked as a summer intern at WPD through a program for at-risk youth. I started as a cadet shortly after graduating from Laney High School and was sworn in as an officer on my 21st birthday. Rising through the ranks, I remained deeply committed to serving the city I've always called home. Being appointed Chief of Police remains one of my greatest honors, but at my core, I have always been a Wilmington police officer.

Through collaboration and shared vision, we focused heavily on a modern "serve and protect" model rooted in the principles of 21st century policing versus the traditional "law and order model." This evolution required dedication, and while it remains a work in progress, it is necessary for the safety and trust of the community we serve.

Our focus on training and accountability has set a new standard for excellence. Under my leadership, WPD became one of the very first law enforcement agencies in the state to receive accreditation through the North Carolina Department of Justice in 2023. We also continued with our Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) accreditation efforts, first awarded in 2011. We implemented robust programs such as Fair and Impartial Policing (Unconscious Bias training) and Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE).

We also strengthened community engagement through initiatives like the Community Engagement Unit, Cop Camp, the Police Activities League (PAL), Teen Night, Cars and Coffee, Women's Personal Self-Defense Program, and the creation of a police museum and education

center. These efforts transformed officers into community caretakers, fostering trust and understanding.

Over the past several years, we have faced significant trials—from a global pandemic and national discussions about the future of policing to civil unrest. WPD adapted, learned, and grew, responding to these challenges with professionalism, resilience, and empathy. Wilmington is now a safer city, with violent crime at lower levels, including a four-year downward trend in homicides.

This success reflects the department's commitment to innovation and collaboration. The Gun Crimes Unit brought unprecedented resources to reduce gun violence. At the same time, initiatives like the FBI's Safe Streets Violent Gang Task Force and the Cape Fear Regional Special Teams Unit enhanced our ability to address violent crime effectively.

WPD also became a state and regional leader in innovation. We expanded our Civilian Crash Investigations Program and implemented a Virtual Response Unit, allowing sworn officers to dedicate more time to crime reduction. Through the jointly launched *Getting Home* task force with New Hanover County social workers, we proactively addressed challenges for those experiencing homelessness.

Additionally, we procured millions of dollars in grants for specialized equipment, including the region's first total containment truck for our bomb squad. Innovations like e-bike patrols for downtown officers, mini mobile command units for watch commanders, and backup generators at major intersections further enhanced our capacity to serve Wilmington effectively.

One of my proudest contributions was leading the design and construction of the Haynes Lacewell Police and Fire Training Facility law enforcement areas, which provides state-of-the-art resources for our officers. This complex project was delivered on time, under budget, and has created no conflicts with the neighboring residential community. Today, training there includes advanced use-of-force simulations, which have led to multiple instances where officers avoided the use of deadly force.

Thinking creatively about our facility needs, we saved approximately \$30 million in planned capital improvements to the Southeast Command Center, ensuring resources were allocated effectively. These efforts leave WPD well-prepared for the future.

Looking forward, I prepare to leave with confidence in the department's trajectory. Our officers are more than enforcers of the law—they are partners in building a stronger community.

I want to extend my gratitude to Mayor Saffo, City Manager Caudle, and current and former members of the City Council for their unwavering support. Your leadership has been instrumental in enabling the progress we've made.

To the residents of Wilmington, thank you for your trust and partnership. Together, we have accomplished great strides in public safety and community trust. This city is not just where I served but where I grew up and became a man.

To the men and women of the Wilmington Police Department, I am deeply grateful for your courage, compassion, and unwavering commitment. You are the heart and soul of this organization and it has been my privilege to lead you.

Though I will step aside later this year, my support for this department and our community remains steadfast. Wilmington's path forward is one of progress, justice, and unity, and I look forward to witnessing its continued success from a new vantage point.

Thank you for allowing me the honor of serving you.

With deepest gratitude and respect,

Donny Williams

Chief of Police, Wilmington Police Department

cc: Anthony Caudle, City Manager
Penny Spicer-Sidbury, City Clerk
Meredeth Everhart, City Attorney