

How easy is it.....

By President Ismael "Vince" Canales

How easy is it to wake up every day, don a uniform, and go off to work to protect and serve the residents of Prince George's County?

How easy is it to take for granted that at the end of your tour of duty you will get home to see those who love you most?

How easy is it for those citizens within our communities to take hours, days, weeks and months to dissect and second guess a decision that you made in a matter of seconds?

And, how easy is it for those you dedicated your life to protect and serve to throw you under a bus and leave you standing alone to have every action scrutinized?

The question "How easy is it..." should make us all pause and think for a moment. I have witnessed firsthand the ease with which the media and the vocal minority within Prince George's County degrade and criticize us. I use the word us because people don't differentiate Officer Smith from Officer Brown. When the criticism begins, it is the agency as a whole that is being labeled.

It is so much easier to rush to judgment. It is easy to constantly refer to a past time within this agency and attach a group of people who for the most part weren't even born yet. It is so much easier to stand with the mob than to stand beside and support those that are simply doing the job that they have been sent out to do.

The loss of any life is tragic. The effect that this has on each of us varies from person to person. The continuous introspection of the critical event; and, then listening to how differently everyone else would have handled the same situation had they been involved. The personal attacks on one's credibility and veracity. All of these things make me wonder why any of us chose this profession.

Each and every one of us live with the choices we make on a daily basis. These decisions are based primarily on the authority provided to us through the law and allegedly with the full support of those that we have sworn to defend. While we may not wish to acknowledge this fact, there are people in this world who have no respect for authority and have a total disregard of the law.

We are the ones that serve as frontline protection from those that would wish to cause the citizens of Prince George's County harm. We can all question the motives of these individuals.

We can wonder what would make someone break the law knowing the potential consequences for their actions.

The hypocrisy in all of this is that society would much rather excuse the actions of those breaking the law than defend those of us who are tasked with upholding it. Seldom are the actions of an individual that leads to a police contact ever addressed. Rarely is society ever as outraged at an individual's actions as they are at the police response to it. And, the benefit of the doubt often goes to the individual breaking the law instead of us.

Many a critic will say that we, the police, should not be above the law. They will champion the call for protecting an individual's civil liberties. They will tout all of the positive past deeds that an individual may have accomplished. They will seldom, however, highlight the negatives associated with these individuals. Nor will they ever acknowledge the fact that, in certain situations, these individuals have trampled upon the civil liberties of others within their communities while conducting their criminal activity.

While I fully advocate the need for internal and/or external reviews of critical situations, I ask that society allow the process to run its course before passing judgment. While I speak with many within these communities who appreciate the hard diligent work that each of you do, their sentiments are seldom written about.

Law enforcement's ability to proactively combat crime has been stifled through more stringent, defendant friendly, legislation. Special action groups aggressively advocate for many that continuously break the law. And, the voices of the victims of crime, and their advocates, are slowly but surely being silenced.

The system is broken. Law enforcement continuously evolves; and, as concerns are raised, we constantly look for ways to prevent and address these issues. Accountability goes both ways. Prosecutors must aggressively prosecute those that commit crime. Judges must start appropriately sentencing these individuals as well. In many of these situations, these offenders had earlier contacts with the judicial system for minor infractions of the law. Had these matters been dealt with appropriately at that level, we may have been able to deter these individuals from future criminal activity.

I respect each and everyone one of you for the job you do. I commend you for putting the citizens of this County and making their safety a primary concern of yours every day. And, I will continue to champion your concerns and put forth all of the great work and deeds that I know you do on a daily basis.

To everyone reading this I pose these questions, how easy would it be for each and every officer to treat this simply as a job? And finally, how easy would it be for every officer to simply be reactive to crime throughout the County?