From: Jones, Ross <
Sent: Monday, April 14, 2025 11:20 AM
To: FOIA GRPD <foiagrpd@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Mayor <mayor@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Winstrom, Eric <ewinstrom@grand-rapids.mi.us>; City Attorney's Office <cityattorney@grand-rapids.mi.us>
Subject: APPEAL to Denial of FOIA Request

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a formal appeal to the response to a series of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request dated April 1, 2025 seeking police reports naming Roconda Singleton.

In its response, your agency redacted Singleton's name but citied no legal exemptions to support doing so. In response to a subsequent e-mail, Brae Brown disclosed that the policy for blanket withholding of individuals names was an internal one, writing: "Our policy is to redact the names and personal information of anyone listed in a police report who has not been arrested or charged with a crime."

This redaction is improper and unsupported under Michigan's Freedom of Information Act, MCL 15.231 et seq., and must be reversed.

I. The redacted individual is the subject of overwhelming and legitimate public interest.

As the department knows, Singleton is now charged in the death of one of her children, whom she is accused of killing by setting her home on fire, thereby placing her neighbors in harm's way. Prior to this tragedy, Singleton had been involuntarily hospitalized for mental health concerns, and her children were temporarily removed from her care while Child Protective Services conducted an investigation. That investigation was closed by CPS without further intervention. These circumstances raise significant and serious questions about the actions (and inactions) of multiple public agencies charged with protecting both children and adults, and how they responded to warning signs of harm.

Given the gravity of these events, there is an overwhelming public interest in examining prior police interactions involving Singleton. The redaction of her name hinders that examination and undermines the public's ability to evaluate how law enforcement and other institutions responded to warning signs before this fatal event occurred. Additionally, it creates unnecessary confusion about Singleton's role in each police incident, making it impossible to determine whether she was a complainant, witness, suspect or bystander.

II. The redaction is not required—and is in fact not permitted—under Michigan FOIA.

Your agency's justification appears to rely on the idea that identifying individuals who are not charged or arrested constitutes an invasion of privacy. However, Michigan courts have consistently rejected blanket privacy redactions without a clear and compelling showing of how disclosure would constitute a *clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy*.

Under **MCL 15.243(1)(a)**, public bodies may exempt "[i]nformation of a personal nature if public disclosure of the information would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of an individual's privacy." But Michigan courts have emphasized that this is a *narrow* exemption. In *Detroit Free Press v. City of Southfield*, 269 Mich App 275 (2005), the Michigan Court of Appeals held that names and incident details in police records must generally be disclosed, even when the subjects of those records were not arrested or charged.

Furthermore, Michigan law balances privacy against the public interest in disclosure. The Michigan Supreme Court has stated that "the public has a valid interest in knowing how law enforcement agencies carry out their duties" (*State Employees Ass'n v. Dept. of Management and Budget*, 428 Mich 104, 121 (1987)). In this case, that interest is not only valid—it is urgent.

III. There is no legal basis for a blanket policy of redacting names of non-arrestees.

A blanket rule of redacting names of individuals not charged with crimes is not authorized under FOIA and does not meet the law's requirement for a case-by-case balancing of privacy against public interest. Michigan courts have found that such blanket policies are "arbitrary and capricious" and contrary to the statute.

Given the now-known context involving this individual and the failure of multiple systems to prevent the death of a child, it is clear that the public interest in disclosure outweighs any minimal privacy interest—especially since the woman has now been publicly identified in court proceedings and news coverage.

IV. Request for Relief

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully request that your agency reverse its decision to redact the individual's name from the responsive documents and provide an unredacted version of the records, as it relates to Ms. Singleton's name, without delay.

This is not a close call. The records being sought by WXYZ-TV help illuminate how government—and in this case, the Department of Health and Human Services and the mental health system—operates when claims of child abuse or neglect are made. Chief Winstrom has been quoted recently, and throughout his career in Grand Rapids, as being a champion for "total transparency." We are merely asking the City to meet the chief's standard with its response to this appeal.

The requested records are very clearly in the public's interest, and I again urge you to release them immediately.

Ross Jones | WXYZ-TV Detroit

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