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The Calls to Action Are Not a Faulty Assumption. They Are a Test of Leadership.

Springfield, IL – On Tuesday, November 10, Sangamon County Administrator Brian McFadden told the County Board that the Massey Commission worked from a "faulty assumption" that the county could make all 26 Calls to Action happen. That characterization is wrong, and it deserves a direct correction.

The Massey Commission did not assume Sangamon County had unilateral authority to implement all 26 Calls to Action. We understood from the beginning that addressing systemic racism, institutional mistrust, and inequitable access to public services would require coordination across multiple institutions, jurisdictions, and levels of government. That was precisely the point. Systems do not operate in isolation, and neither can solutions.

The Commission was not charged with identifying only those reforms that fit within the county's existing authority or budget. We were charged with examining the systemic failures that ended in the murder of Sonya Massey in her own home on July 6, 2024, and with recommending meaningful paths toward change. Our recommendations were intentionally ambitious because the problems they address are longstanding, interconnected, and deadly. We knew implementation would require partnerships, legislative action, funding, and sustained

public accountability. Those realities do not make the recommendations faulty. They make implementation a matter of leadership.

There's an important distinction between having the authority to require another institution to act, and having the responsibility to help organize, coordinate, and advance a response. When Massey Community Action Network (MCAN) leadership met with County Board Chairman Andy Van Meter and State Senator Doris Turner, we were told the county has no power to tell other institutions what to do. That may describe a limit on the authority to command independent partners. It does not answer what county leadership can do, or what responsibility it has, to bring those partners together. Sangamon County does not need authority over hospitals, the City Of Springfield, rural fire departments, or schools to convene them, help clarify responsibility for each action, and keep the work moving. If the county cannot require a partner to act, it can still identify that partner and help make the path to implementation visible and accountable.

If county leadership believes a particular Call to Action exceeds its authority, the appropriate response is to identify the responsible implementing partner and help hold that partner to the work, not to characterize the recommendation itself as the product of a faulty assumption.

We also need to be honest about money. In February 2025, the County Board unanimously approved a $10 million settlement with Sonya Massey's family, and county leadership assured the public that no taxes would be raised, no debt taken on, and no services cut to pay it. Mr. McFadden said at the time that the county anticipates such instances and plans accordingly. The money was found. It is always found when the government acts egregiously and takes a life or causes serious and lasting harm. Yet when it comes to the training, mental health response, transparency, and community investment that would keep us from ever reaching that point again, the money is suddenly hard to find and the authority suddenly out of reach. A county that can plan for the cost of a death can plan for the cost of preventing one.

We are tired of watching leaders kick the can on accountability. What the Commission found in the course of its charge is that the current system does not need minor adjustments. It needs to be torn down and rebuilt so that it no longer takes lives when it is convenient and pays for them afterward. That will require an enormous amount of effort, and we recognize it is not where those in power want to spend their time, because the system as it stands works for them. It has to work for everyone.

The appropriate question is not whether Sangamon County can accomplish all 26 Calls to Action alone. It cannot, and no one has ever expected it to. The question is whether county leadership is prepared to help build the partnerships, structures, and accountability mechanisms necessary to accomplish them.

The Massey Commission completed its charge. MCAN exists to see that charge carried out, and the responsibility now is to turn recommendations into measurable action. The people who entrusted us with their stories, their experiences, and their hopes for a safer and more equitable community deserve nothing less. Sonya Massey deserved nothing less.

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