



Town of Danvers

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Joint Statement from the Town of Danvers on the Thin Blue Line Flag

September 18, 2020

To the Danvers Community:

It has been an emotional and educational few weeks for our community, as we've discussed the meaning and power of symbols, how best to make our first responders feel supported, and how best to make every member of the Danvers community feel included. The four of us found ourselves at the center of this discussion, even though the discussion itself is bigger than any of us, the symbol itself, or the Town of Danvers.

A handful of those participating in this discussion were uncivil, but most were not. Comments at the Select Board's September 2nd Community Conversation, and most of the email and phone correspondence we have received, has been well-reasoned, well-intentioned, and respectful. To the hundreds of residents who made their voices heard, we thank you.

Local government is only successful through the active participation of its residents, so we hope that some of those who recently engaged with us for the first time will look for ways to stay engaged, whether that be volunteering, running for Town Meeting, or simply staying in touch with us. Here is a link to get you started on your journey:

<https://www.danversma.gov/documents/talent-pool-application/>

Much of the disagreement these past three weeks was concerning the meaning and power of a *symbol*: its historical meaning, its more recent use, its importance to the first responder community, and the painful connotations it creates for some members of the Danvers community. The *substance* of the discussion, however, was rock-solid agreement on the respect and appreciation this community has for the hard work, sacrifice, and dedication of our first responders. At the Community Conversation, the Select Board members disagreed on the flag (symbol), but all five expressed their unequivocal support of our public safety personnel (substance). The same was true for the hundreds of residents who engaged with us in this process: half expressed *support* for their first responders and *approval* of the flag; the other half expressed *support* for their first responders and *disapproval* of the flag. The theme (support for public safety) was and is clear.

If nothing else, this discussion has helped us to identify several opportunities moving forward.

First, it is clear that the broader debate over police reform, racial justice, and police brutality like we saw this summer in Minneapolis, has landed on our shores in Danvers, and that this debate has taken a toll on the morale and optimism of our public safety professionals. This makes us sad, and we need to address it. We need to listen to our first responders, understand their frustration, and find ways to reaffirm our support for them in ways that do not feel unwelcoming to our neighbors.

Second, we need to listen to what our neighbors are saying. Their negative reaction to this symbol has almost everything to do with what is happening in our *country* and almost nothing to do with what is happening in our *community*. We need to partner with these residents to understand their experience in Danvers and see if we can make Danvers feel as welcoming to them as it feels to us.

Because, ultimately, that is the point. We want Danvers to be a welcoming community. We want it to be a welcoming place for police officers and firefighters who work hard and deserve to feel supported, and we want it to be a welcoming place for long-time residents, new residents, young residents, old residents, LGBTQ residents, black residents, white residents, and every shade in between.

That is something we, and hopefully everyone, can agree on.

Respectfully,

Daniel C. Bennett, Chair of the Danvers Select Board
Robert Amerault, Fire Chief
Patrick Ambrose, Police Chief
Steve Bartha, Town Manager