



Ken Braun: Does Oakland County Sheriff think transparency kills cops?

By Ken Braun

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Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard is a politician with a badge and a lot of big guns at his disposal. He doesn't like questions about what he does with that weaponry. State Rep. Tom McMillin, R - Rochester Hills, chair of the House Government Oversight Committee, has made it his business to question the politicians with the most firepower in Michigan.

McMillin's curiosity recently earned him a stinging letter from Bouchard, accusing the lawmaker of fueling "anti-police movements" that have "culminated in police assassinations across the country." Bouchard apparently references a pair of white supremacists in Las Vegas who ambushed two police officers and draped a swastika over the body of one.

It is unclear why this is relevant to McMillin, but here's something that is:

In a well publicized police raid this May, a Georgia SWAT team tossed a flash bang grenade into the playpen of a 19 month old little boy, blasting the child's chest open and landing him in a medically induced coma with potentially a lifetime of debilitating injuries. The police didn't know the toddler lived in the home: They were looking for a drug suspect who was related to the homeowner, yet ... *didn't live in the home*. Neither drugs nor suspects were found, just carnage.

So-called "botched" SWAT raids are the subject of "War Comes Home: The Excessive Militarization of American Policing," an extensively researched report published last month by the American Civil Liberties Union. Similar to "Overkill: The Rise of Paramilitary Police Raids in America," published by the free-market Cato Institute eight years ago, the ACLU report relies on many horror stories that have reached public awareness, plus whatever statistics they could acquire to shine a barely flickering light of oversight in the direction of this dark corner of government power.

Statistics are the problem. SWAT raids are unleashed against American civilians roughly once every 15 minutes, risking the lives of both police and civilians, but we have no way of knowing how often they're necessary.

"Agencies that monitor and provide oversight over the militarization of policing are virtually non-existent," notes the ACLU.

To remedy this, they recommend state governments require quarterly reports from police detailing the basic facts behind each SWAT deployment. Modeled on a Maryland law, these would include the justification for the deployment, list of people injured or killed, a basic

statement of what happened, and other factors. The information requested is general and excludes specific addresses or names, thus protecting privacy and any ongoing police casework.

McMillin has introduced a more modest example of this proposal in each of the last two sessions of the Legislature. Bouchard has opposed these bills, arguing “local control” provides sufficient oversight and that his department already effectively disciplines any wayward officers. While it’s possible Oakland County is immune to the problems the ACLU has found elsewhere in the nation, it’s potentially revealing the sheriff doesn’t want the public to be able to see for itself.

Impeded here, McMillin has moved on to looking into other law enforcement procedures, such as police drone surveillance, inciting the secretive sheriff to send his melodramatic missive.

Many politicians talk a good game on transparency without delivering. Thomas Jefferson said government’s affairs should be so “clear and intelligible” that “any man” can scrutinize them. If the public can see what Oakland County does with its taxes, then we should be able to see what it does with its guns. The voters there appear to have elected a politician so eager to hide the data that he will baselessly link a nosy lawmaker to cop-killing Nazis two thousand miles away.