



DANE COUNTY YOUTH COMMISSION



KATHLEEN FALK
Dane County Executive

LYNN GREEN,
Director, Department of Human Services

DEBORAH HOBBINS
Chair, Dane County Youth Commission

CONNIE BETTIN
Prevention Services Manager

March 27, 2009

To: Members, Common Council of Madison
Mayor David Cieslewicz
Police Chief Noble Wray

From: Dane County Youth Commission

Re: Amending Sections 23.11(1)(a) and (b) of the Madison General Ordinances to modify the curfew hours for juveniles

Dear Sir or Madam:

Central to the charge of the Dane County Youth Commission is to ensure the welfare and safety of young people and to ensure that public policy changes are based on sound rationale and thoroughly consider every possible impact on youth. Given this charge, the Youth Commission respectfully requests that the Common Council take the following points into consideration as it deliberates the City curfew ordinance amendment.

Members of the Youth Commission and the Youth Resource Network, a subcommittee of the Commission, attended the EOC and Community Service Commission meetings to gather information on the amendment. Mary O'Donnell, Office of Community Services, briefed the Youth Commission on the history and issues resulting in the proposed amendment. The Youth Commission believes that several of the issues leading to this amendment may be relevant to the community, but do not seem to directly relate to youth or indicate a need to change the curfew.

It is the understanding of the Youth Commission that the proposed curfew change is intended to address and reduce neighborhood noise violations. As the City has ordinances in place to control noise issues, changing curfew to address noise violations seems misguided. Secondly, adults frequently generate neighborhood noise, not youth, again making a curfew change irrelevant. The Youth Commission also understands that the new curfew hours would *not* be enforced, but would primarily be used as a law enforcement "prevention tool" to move youth indoors when police drive through the neighborhood. If this is indeed accurate, the Youth Commission strongly recommends that the City not enact ordinances that will not, or cannot, be enforced as this encourages youth disregard, rather than respect, for law.

High school members of the Dane County Youth Board raised questions regarding the subjective nature of enforcing the proposed curfew and feared the possibility of profiling youth who look a certain way or live in low-income neighborhoods.

Finally, the Youth Commission encourages the Council to take into consideration all of the unintended and potentially, long-term ramifications for youth who are issued tickets and cannot pay for them or do not understand that unpaid tickets result in financial credit reports that in turn interfere with apartment rental, purchasing a vehicle, etc. Several years ago, the Dane County Youth Board lead an effort to create uniform ordinances throughout the county to provide youth consistent community rules on curfew. This proposed change will result in Madison having the earliest curfew in the county and may lead to youth from other communities being cited and ticketed for curfew violations

The Dane County Youth Commission respectfully requests that as the Council deliberates the curfew amendment, it consider the available research on the effectiveness of early curfews, that it clearly determines why the change is necessary, and most importantly, that the Council consider all of the ramifications of implementing and enforcing new curfew hours

Sincerely,

Deborah Hobbins

Deborah Hobbins,
Chair, Dane County Youth Commission