



May 25, 2020 (/news/2020/5/25/from-bryan-county-sheriff-candidate-mike-fordham)

A Message From Bryan County Sheriff Candidate Mike Fordham (/news/2020/5/25/from-bryan-county-sheriff-candidate-mike-fordham)

Dear neighbors, friends, family, and colleagues:

My family and I now find ourselves with a unique opportunity to provide context and truth in an otherwise unfortunate situation. Of recent, you, or someone you may know, may have received a publication which raises substantial questions about me, my character, and my suitability to hold public office. I will attempt here to provide context and truth to that medium with full knowledge and expectation that the response will be critically dissected.

I categorically deny the allegations made by a former spouse. In the U.S. Department of Defense, any allegation made of a Commissioned Officer is thoroughly investigated, as they should be. Commissioned Officers are held to a higher standard than others who may fill military ranks for unto us are entrusted the lives of America's sons and daughters. The case was thoroughly



investigated, litigated, and the charges were dismissed.

The information which you may not have is that those criminal allegations were made after my former spouse was notified and subsequently served with the civil process of a divorce. Other information which you may not know is that subsequent to the allegations I served honorably as a Senior Military Analyst, graduated the U.S. Army War College in 2013, promoted to Colonel, and fulfilled a final utilization tour of duty as an advisor for Border Security, Law Enforcement, and Corrections to the Institute for Military Support of Governance. In 2018 I retired from the U.S. Army with 27 honorable years of service, at the rank of Colonel, and with the retention of my Top-Secret Security Clearance. If the allegations were true, none of this would have been the case.

Insofar as Melissa and me, we remain happily married and are raising our granddaughter. There have been significant stressors in our marriage. One of our sons, who we love dearly, is an inmate in the Georgia Department of Corrections because of convictions related to substance abuse and addiction. These events occurred after Melissa and I were married and along with other factors precipitated our petition to the Juvenile Court to have our granddaughter, who is the light of my heart, placed in our custody. Melissa is devastated by all of this and wanted me to add that she is eager to attest to the fact that there has been no spousal abuse in our marriage. I too am concerned and desire to protect my wife and our granddaughter from the damaging misinformation which was inappropriately released and disseminated.

One of the basic tenants of true journalism is to diligently seek out the subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing. You should find that in their code of ethics. That courtesy was never afforded to me in the recent publication and distribution of misinformation that has occurred. One of the basic responsibilities of an informed society is to critically think about what may be reported. I find that critical thinking is sometimes hard but always rewarding. My grandmother knew this when I was a child and rumors surfaced in our neighborhood or at Church; her response was, "Consider the source."

Nevertheless, I refuse to stand by without responding to slanderous, uninformed, and/or deliberate disinformation about my character or my family. My critical thinking skills force me to ask; who would want that done and why? It has been my experience in forty-five years of public service, routinely interfacing with media outlets, that reporters rarely "stumble" on such selective coverage as I have been afforded of late.

Similarly, the Peace Officer Standards and Training issues were reported out of context and are

incomplete. Court information contained in those records are considered confidential under the Georgia Open Records Act releasable only to the peace officer to whom they pertain or to a law enforcement unit where the peace officer may be employed or seeking employment. For every deployment made in support of U.S. Contingency Operations I had to request a waiver for the in-service training hours which I was unable to complete while serving on active duty. Each request was granted, and I am eligible to seek higher levels of certification to include that required of Sheriff as administered by the Georgia Sheriff's Association.

Now I must ask a personal favor. I have spent a lifetime defending our American values which includes Amendment I of our Constitution. However, no law can regulate our morals or our human decency towards one another. My wife and our granddaughter, both of whom I love dearly, have been drawn into this most unfortunate situation before us. With all my heart I ask of you to please discontinue, delete, or remove any reference to their lives which you may have the capacity or capability to do. Sometimes, exercising our Constitutional rights may have the untenable consequence of destroying others. If anyone is desirous of administering blame or shaming please focus those efforts toward me alone.

I am asking you to look at the complete picture and understand the context, source, and records for all involved. I regret that in this situation innocent people have been hurt by the spread of deliberately incomplete information selectively published without full context. This misinformation has caused pain for others and me. For the pain that it has caused others please know that I am deeply sorry that you have inadvertently and inappropriately been drawn into the political arena.

It is my promise to you that should I be elected your next Sheriff I will personally review each request for open records that may come into your Sheriff's Office. Where there is discretionary release authority under the Georgia Open Records Act I will err on the side of your privacy.

Any employee who may assume that Bryan County records are personal property, may be used for personal gain or otherwise will be afforded due process in accordance with a progressive discipline system delineated in policy. I am not and never have been an unapologetic person. When I am wrong, I admit to that. As a leader I am used to seeking responsibility and taking responsibility for my actions and the actions of organizations which I have had the opportunity to lead.

I simply do not have the words to express how grateful we are to those who recognize the truth of what this has really been about, for reaching out to me and Melissa, and for your prayers for all of us. Please know that we truly treasure you and your friendship.

Sincerely,
Mike Fordham

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