



International Brotherhood of Police Officers

A DIVISION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

On January 5, 2026, members of the Holyoke Police Supervisor's Union, Local #409, and the Holyoke Police Patrolman's Union, Local #388 formally requested a written response from City officials regarding the documented conduct of City Councilor Israel Rivera during his recent arrest—conduct that raises serious ethical, professional, and moral concerns. To date, that request has been met with silence.

Because the City of Holyoke does not have a municipal ethics commission, the established and appropriate process for addressing ethics or conflict-of-interest concerns is to bring such matters to the City Solicitor, who serves as the City's legal and ethics advisor. The City Solicitor is responsible for advising elected officials on whether participation in a matter presents an actual or apparent conflict of interest and whether recusal is necessary to protect the integrity of the City's decision-making process. Our letter followed that process precisely.

Our request was hand-delivered to Mayor Joshua Garcia, City Solicitor Lisa Ball, and City Council President Tessa Murphy-Romboletti. Despite this, we received no guidance, no acknowledgment, and no response. Instead, the Mayor publicly deflected responsibility, stating that the issue should be taken to the Commonwealth or to the unions' own legal counsel. As reported by News 22, the Mayor stated: *"I want to clarify that the responsibility for providing such guidance lies with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the union's own legal counsel. I strongly encourage the union to reach out to the appropriate authorities for guidance."*

Faced with the City's refusal to act, we were left with no choice but to file a formal ethics complaint and submit a public records request for the body-worn camera footage related to this incident.

Equally troubling—if not more so—was Councilor Rivera's repeated and deliberate use of the racial slur, commonly referred to as the “N-word”, during his interaction with members of the Massachusetts State Police. This was not a single utterance taken out of context. It was repeated, unmistakable, and offensive. Mayor Garcia publicly characterized this conduct as a “personal matter.” Let us be clear: **the use of racist slurs by an elected official is not a personal matter.** It is a direct affront to the principles of **diversity, equity, and inclusion** that City leadership has repeatedly claimed to uphold.



When an elected official uses racist language, it signals contempt not only for entire communities, but for the public office they hold. Racism does not become acceptable because it comes from a City Councilor, and threats do not become permissible because they come from a City Councilor. Silence from City leadership does not make these issues disappear—it magnifies them.

Mayor Garcia chose to highlight Chief Kennan's first-year "successes" in what appears to be an obvious deflection tactic. He cited increased traffic enforcement, an 111% increase in gun seizures, and boasted that calls for service rose by 40%. What he failed to mention, however, were the men and women of Local 388 and Local 409—the officers who actually did the work. They were the ones who physically confiscated the 78 illegal firearms. They wrote the more than 2,300 traffic citations. They responded to the 60,000 calls for service!

All of this was accomplished while the department remains severely understaffed and grossly underpaid. Holyoke Police Officers are among the lowest-paid in Western Massachusetts, yet they carry what is arguably the highest workload and face some of the most dangerous conditions in the entire state. Given these realities, a simple response to our request would have been both warranted and appropriate.

Holyoke deserves leadership that confronts racism and ethical misconduct directly and unequivocally, not leadership that ignores such behavior when it becomes politically inconvenient. Our members serve this community with professionalism and integrity every day. We expect no less from those elected to lead it.

Having received and reviewed the footage of this incident, we are appalled by Councilor Rivera's behavior. We believe all city officials should agree that his actions fall well short of the standards expected of someone entrusted with representing the citizens of Holyoke on the City Council. Initially, our request was limited to Councilor Rivera recusing himself from matters involving our department. However, after observing his conduct in the footage—conduct that was embarrassing, unethical, and racially offensive—we believe stronger action is warranted.

Accordingly, we call upon Mayor Garcia, Council President Murphy-Romboletti, all members of local government and our residents to join us in urging Israel Rivera to resign from his position on the City Council.

Respectfully,

Local #409 and Local #388