

Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther responds to unrest, asks for peaceful protests

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COLUMBUS (WCMH) — Columbus has seen its share of peaceful protests in recent years over allegations of police brutality and racism. But the protest Thursday night turned violent.

Mayor Andrew Ginther told NBC4 he understands the anger.

“I think what you’re seeing is a compounding of frustration of anger, of resentment, and a lot of people who have have been personally hurt by racism and discrimination,” Ginther said.

The mayor said he wants people to protest and to exercise their constitutional right to be heard.

“This country, this community is rooted in peaceful protest, people making sure that they hold their government and the authority accountable,” Ginther said.

But Adrian Jones, an intervention specialist with Columbus Urban League, says while there’s no justification for vandalism or looting, sometimes people feel the need to scream to be heard.

“Sometimes we feel like peace means whisper,” Jones said. “Most of the time, whispers go unheard and until you scream really loud, then everybody starts paying attention, but then they look at you as the aggressor.”

Mayor Ginther said Columbus police officers showed incredible restraint, taking action only after some of the protesters turned violent by breaking out windows and damaging property.

But to those in the community who now focus solely on the vandalism, the mayor says they should focus instead on the root cause of the protest.

“They need to see and understand the frustrations of our neighbors who continue to see at every turn where racism and discrimination is negatively impacting them: their health, their safety, their welfare,” Ginther said. “We all owe a community commitment to justice, fairness and equity.”

Mayor Ginther released this statement on Friday:

I understand why some residents are angry. I’m angry, too. Angry at the injustices perpetrated on our black and brown brothers and sisters. Angry at the racism that persists in our country year after year.

We know that racism exists in our city, in our neighborhoods, in the workplace and in the Columbus Division of Police. Chief Quinlan has been making solid steps toward implementing plans to flush out racism and to eliminate it from the ranks. He is working to improve community police relations.

We need to hire more people of color to be police officers to reflect the diversity of our beautiful city, and we are working hard to do that. We have started a cadet program to work as a pipeline to recruit more women and men of color to serve. Our last police recruit classes have shown greater diversity than in the last decade.

This isn't enough. We can do more and we will. Chief Quinlan is forming a chief's council to hear directly from residents. He formed the Police and Community Together Team (PACT) to address human trafficking with the community. He has put in place officer wellness checks before incidents happen and has eliminated officers' ability to use accrued leave to pay off suspensions.

Real change is a community effort. And it is hard. It takes every one of us to make change happen. And yes, it takes protests to show anger and frustration.

But protests must remain peaceful. Last night, a few people used the opportunity of the protest to vandalize the Statehouse, the Ohio Theatre and other businesses downtown. That accomplishes nothing and will not be tolerated. Nor will throwing objects at the police.

Neighbors, this is our city. It is what we make it. Let's use our frustration not to tear down and destroy but to lift up and make change.

ANDREW GINTHER, COLUMBUS MAYOR