

**For Immediate Release**

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## Media Release

### **Pulse of CCSD – Backman’s law enforcement career prepared her for position with CCSD**

#### Office of Communications

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**Charleston, SC** – Charleston County School District (CCSD) has one of the strongest security teams around, as evidenced by the recent recognition from [Campus Safety Magazine](#).

The CCSD Security and Emergency Management team's mission is to promote and support an environment that fosters life safety and the continuation of the learning process within the district. This is accomplished through comprehensive emergency planning, the delivery of effective training, developing community partnerships, employing effective security measures, and providing situational guidance to school staff and administrators during critical incidents.

Many of the people that make up this team are former and retired military and law enforcement members with varied backgrounds. In recognition of National First Responders Day, celebrated Friday, October 28, 2022, CCSD recognizes Jennifer Backman, Deputy Director of Security Operations.

National First Responders Day on October 28 recognizes the heroic men and women who make it their business to take immediate action when disaster strikes. Congress designated October 28 as National First Responders Day in 2017. The resolution honors the firefighters, police officers, EMTs, and all those who are first on the scene in stressful situations.

Backman retired from the Mount Pleasant Police Department (MPPD) after [26 years](#). She was the first African-American female to hold the rank of Lieutenant.

“She does an incredible job of supporting her schools, establishing relationships with school administrators and staff, and working directly with parents to solve issues,” said Michael Reidenbach, Executive Director of Security and Emergency Management. “Jennifer brings to our team a tremendous amount of training and experience, and her drive to foster

positive relationships and work directly with the community to solve problems makes her a huge asset. We are incredibly lucky to have her on our team.”

The success Backman boasts in the second half of her storied career is due in part to the training and experience she gained while at MPPD.

### **A call to serve**

The Brooklyn, NY native’s urban upbringing was a far cry from Mount Pleasant’s suburban environment. However, the concept of community policing doesn’t change because of the landscape.

Backman permanently relocated to the Charleston area for higher education. She began her career with MPPD in 1994, and throughout the years worked as a police officer on patrol, a detective, and a first-line supervisor in Criminal Investigations. She continued her career as a Sergeant in Patrol and later in Internal Affairs until promoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

Backman met then MPPD Chief Tommy Sexton as she began to familiarize herself with the Lowcountry. He told her when she was ready for a job in law enforcement, that she should come see him.

She applied at three different agencies. All three offered her a position, but Backman ultimately chose MPPD because of Sexton’s belief that an education could open many doors.

“He told me that I was smart and I would go far in life,” said Backman. “He encouraged me to continue to further my education when appropriate and I did just that. He planted that seed early on in my life and I will forever be appreciative.”

Backman had some challenges as she rose through the ranks.

“There were not many females in law enforcement in my early years,” said Backman. “That little girl with the New York accent didn’t jive with many people at first. I worked hard to earn the trust of the public I served and to prove myself as a capable female officer. The uniform doesn’t always mean people will respect you. You have to earn that. Along the way, I had great mentors like Cpl. Adell Harris from Charleston Police Department and the first Black female officer in South Carolina. ”

Backman did earn the respect of her peers, the brass, and the community.

The next chief Backman reported to was Roddy Perry who, like Sexton, made community policing a top priority.

A Family Crisis Unit was established so that officers could focus on family issues like child and elder abuse, or domestic violence. This was a classic example of social control theory that purposes socialization, builds self-control, and reduces negative behavior by direct interaction at the lowest level to prevent extreme circumstances.

"The idea was to get to the root of family crisis issues to possibly deter the progression of behaviors such as a homicide or shooting," said Backman. "Chief Perry was on the right track. Every officer at every level learned to dig in deep to get to the root of family issues that could lead to further criminal choices."

That type of policing makes Backman a perfect candidate for her role with CCSD.

"I use my law enforcement background as a foundation here at CCSD," said Backman. "The Security and Emergency Management team works hand in hand with our law enforcement partners across the county. We are easily able to interact and collaborate with those officers because we already know how to handle or de-escalate a situation, and what evidence and information we need to collect. We are able to hand over to responding law enforcement officers, essentially a complete package."

Like MPPD, the district is proactive rather than reactive, Backman explained.

"CCSD is very innovative," said Backman. "We are at the forefront when it comes to safety and security. CCSD has such innovative managers and supervisors that see well beyond what needs to be in place. Michael Reidenbach is a workhorse. He is always looking at how we can improve and solicits ideas from people within, not just our team, but the industry. Districts across the country mimic what CCSD is doing because it is so innovative. It is very invigorating to work with this team."

Backman and her team members all have one goal in common - to keep schools safe. No two days are alike. Team members respond to schools for many reasons and are trained to approach any situation imaginable.

"What might seem insignificant can actually be a major security issue," said Backman. "If a facility loses electricity, for example, we have to assess the air temperature for students and staff, determine if we can provide meals and so much more. A whole day can be spent helping to navigate a power outage. In the end, the lights come back on and we go on as usual. We don't treat those things as insignificant."

Sometimes team members help the administration deal with a disruptive student.

"We try to get ahead of situations," said Backman. "If we don't, it can make for a bad day. Many times it involves simply listening. Students need to be heard, parents want to be heard. Those are things we are all trained to do in a delicate dignified manner so everyone feels respected."

During Backman's law enforcement career she also spent time in East Cooper schools. In the early part of her career, she oversaw a program called Teens, Crime and the Community. She led this program and other similar crime prevention programs for teens for several years.

"Time spent with those children and their relatives helped me see how important it is to get to know the families that we serve," said Backman. "That's how you build trust and relationships. It is just important to me today as I interact with CCSD families."

The focus on family is at the core of everything Backman does.

"I really use that as a basis when interacting with our CCSD families," said Backman. "I see the challenges that many go through every day. Those range from social economics to psychological mental health issues, or abuse. I understand it."

Backman describes the security team as a mighty army

"A lighthouse is the beacon of security," added Backman. "It lights an area up and tells mariners 'this is where you go if need help.' A picture of a lighthouse hangs in our office and every time I see it I think 'we are the lighthouse for CCSD'. Our backgrounds empower each team member to help the families and our student, and help our schools stay safe."

During the years Backman worked in law enforcement, she spearheaded multiple programs to strengthen community relations and deter juvenile delinquency. She also created a mentoring program to help new officers adapt to the profession and minimize the turnover rate. Additionally, Backman received many awards such as Woman of the Year, Corporal of the Year, and Most Professional. Lieutenant Backman holds a master's degree from Springfield College and earned a Doctor Degree from Capella University. She was also an adjunct professor at Voorhees College and Springfield College.

Reidenbach sees Backman's drive for personal and professional development in her daily work.

"Not only has Jennifer excelled in her educational accomplishments, but she independently seeks out opportunities for continued professional development," said Reidenbach. "She volunteered to represent our office at the state's active shooter conference this year, and she is currently completing coursework to obtain an advanced certification in Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED. Jennifer has an incredible level of training from her storied law enforcement career, but she continues to look for ways to bring additional skills and training to the district's security program."

Backman appreciates working for CCSD.

"I am very proud of the two-part career I've been privileged to enjoy," said Backman. "What I am most proud of are my grown children who are finishing their higher education degrees and heading off into their own careers. They have understood the importance of my urging them to always seek opportunities to learn and grow."

### **Always on call**

"In honor of first responder week, from foreign to domestic, I commend all those who put their personal needs aside in the fight and protect others," said Backman. "Those that miss special celebrations, birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays to work and keep others safe, I salute you. First responders make the ultimate sacrifice every day from the time one is sworn into service and reports to work, and we must ensure the ultimate sacrifice never goes in vain."

Backman said that since she has been with the school district, she has witnessed countless examples of school personnel defusing situations of aggressive parents, breaking up fights, finding lost children, protecting their teachers, and providing assistance to children in crisis.

"In our current climate, the definition of first responders has morphed to include all of us that work diligently to keep our learning environment safe from harm," said Backman.

*"Real heroes don't wear capes. Real heroes wear uniforms, badges, and stethoscopes. Real heroes are the members of law enforcement, the military, teachers, and first responders. Pretend superheroes wear capes." - Author unknown*

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### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), music and other creative and performing arts, career and technical preparation programs, and military.