

Police Reform Task Force Meeting #8
August 3, 2020

Attendance

Task Force Members: Joy LeViere, Dr. David Harris, Alex Fisher, Valerie McDonald Roberts (co-chair), Dr. Bobbi Watt Geer, Dr. Quintin Bullock (co-chair), Richard Garland, Nathaniel Yap, Sharon Werner, Tim Stevens, Dr. Angela Reynolds, Sylvia Fields, Tony Beltran, Monica Ruiz, Amanda Green-Hawkins

Guests: Darryl Holts (Disability Rights PA), Jessica Benham (Pittsburgh Center for Autistic Advocacy), Jose Diaz (YMCA/Welcoming Pittsburgh), Kheir Mugwaneza (Allegheny Health Network/Welcoming Pittsburgh), Dr. Yinka Aganga-Williams (Justice and Peace Outreach)

Staff: Lindsay Powell (Assistant Chief of Staff), William Lamar, Alaa Mohamed (Policy Coordinator), Brennan Coleman (Intern)

Presentation I: “Disability Rights of Pennsylvania”, presented by Darryl Holts & Jessica Benham

- Disability Rights of Pennsylvania
 - Protection and advocacy agency for the State of PA
 - Connected to Disability Rights Pennsylvania
 - Protects the rights of individuals with disabilities
 - Darryl’s job is to protect the rights of individuals in institutions, but also in communities
- Pittsburgh Center for Autistic Advocacy
 - Run by autistic adults, for autistic adults
- What is “disability?”
 - Not as simple as it might seem
 - Glasses aren’t seen as a disability, but why is requiring a cane seen as a disability?
 - Physical or mental impairment that severely limits someone’s ability to function
- Common models of disability
 - The Medical Model
 - Not always useful to think of disabilities in this way when looking at police work
 - Social Model
 - Social Barriers
 - How do barriers within society disable the individual?
 - Ways our society is set up to discriminate against certain groups of people

- How does our system of policing in Pittsburgh have the potential to further disable people? How do we fix it?
 - Officers view certain disabilities as non-compliance
 - If you look at an African American male, you have different perceptions of that male
 - But he also may have a disability that you can't easily see
 - Sight won't always tell us
 - "The Invisible Disability"
 - Law enforcements officials may engage someone with autism without knowing they have the disability
 - This significantly changes the nature of the engagement
 - This is where the system needs to take a closer look at how we engage people who have disabilities
 - One size doesn't fit all
- Disability and Prisons + Policing: Quick Facts
 - 1/3-1/2 of all people killed by police in the US are disabled, depending on the data source
 - At least 75% of inmates at the Allegheny County Jail have a disability
 - This is what the jail documented
- Disability & Police
 - Why do people with disabilities encounter police more often than people without disabilities?
 - Why do people with disabilities have negative interactions with police more often than those without disabilities?
 - African Americans with disabilities have a double stigma
 - The interactions are more negative because officers don't take the time to learn the particulars of a given situation
- Disability & Violence
 - People with disabilities are much more likely than those without disabilities to be victims of violence
 - In 2015, 29.5 out of 1000 people with disabilities age 12 or older experienced violence, compared to 11.8 out of 1000 people without disabilities
 - If you have a disability, you are often preyed upon by those with ill intentions
 - Law enforcement officials have to develop some patience when interacting with people
 - If they jump the gun and don't let the person speak, you won't get to a peaceful solution
- Disability & Poverty: Quick Facts
 - In 2017, only 18.7% of people with disabilities in the US were employed

- 20% of people with disabilities live below the poverty line compared to 13.8% of those without disabilities
- In PA alone, there are over 13,000 people not receiving the disability services they need
 - A population that is already vulnerable isn't receiving the resources they need in order to thrive
- The Big Picture
 - The problems we identify with policing go beyond individual officers, good or bad
 - We must address systemic racism and ableism and fund social services so that PWDs encounter police less often
 - This is the goal for any population, but especially for one that is so vulnerable
 - Racism is a major part of the problems surrounding excessive policing in the face of those with disabilities
 - Communities need to be protected, not attacked
 - Increase funding for social services
- Specific Policies
 - Fund social workers, trained mediators, mental health professionals, etc. for helping to answer calls related to disability/mental health
 - Communication between police officers and mental health professionals needs to be trained and practiced
 - You have to give the person you're interacting with some thought before you make a rash decision
 - Fund social services aimed at decreasing houselessness, helping people who use drugs, decreasing IPV, decreasing suicide, etc.
 - Strengthen independent civilian police review board
 - Improve data gathering so that we have an accurate picture of interactions between PWDs and police and ensure that this data is publicly available
 - There are too many gaps when looking at police community engagements

Q&A

- Tim Stevens: Why did police feel the need to cuff your son and take him to jail rather than give him a summons?
 - Darryl Holts: I wasn't there, so I'm not entirely sure, but I think because it was so late and he was already in the park, the summons wouldn't have worked. He was already in the park, and there was the false assumption that he knew what he was doing. He did give the officers some lip service, but at that point, they had gone too far and made a rash decision based on where he was and the lateness of the hour.

- Tim Stevens: I have a second question and a specific request, could you dig deeper and give us as many specific ideas as you have that we could give to the Mayor and police in terms of training and dealing with disabilities? Everything you could think of. Would you agree to that?
 - Jessica Benham: Yes, we can try to accommodate that. The officer's that are coming through the academy now do get some disability training on deafness and autism. But training only goes so far when it comes to the biases that we all have
 - Darryl Holts: I don't recommend that we educate the police on the entire mental health system, but we look at who the police interact the most with in terms of those with disabilities. Without that data, you're left with an open field. I don't think an open field is the right type of thing to leave the police. If we narrow it down to who they engage more with, and the training is targeted toward that population as a starting point, it'd be effective.
- Sylvia Fields: I think some of this goes back to recruitment and the type of people we select for the Academy. In Putney, Vermont, how do they work with their police officers that they are sensitive to the needs of a local college dedicated to those with disabilities? I don't see any incidents that happen at that school, so what are they doing?
 - Jessica Benham: Broader cultural acceptance is probably a major part of that. In places like that, they're going to develop relationships with people that don't result in those initial calls to police that start so many situations.
- Nathaniel Yap: Are there regular meetings between the PBP and representatives from the disability community, where they review the number of incidents, metrics, etc.? Are they trying to encourage accountability on a regular basis or a reactionary mode?
 - Jessica Benham: I'm not sure if we gather data on those incidents, and even if we did, I don't think it'd be public. To my knowledge, those relationships between the PBP and disability community exist, but I don't believe there's anything that's broadly organized.
 - Darryl Holts: I don't know of any disability organization that meets with law enforcement in a manner similar to what you asked. If this was to happen, it would start an interesting dynamic and would help law enforcement understand the system.
- Nathaniel Yap: What metrics and data would you like to see collected?
 - Jessica Benham: We can look into that
- Angela Reynolds: If you know of any locations that are good models for us to look at, please let us know. Also, could you go into what you meant by strengthen the CPRB?
 - Jessica Benham: It's crucial for them to be independent, but also to have the authority to hand down disciplinary decisions and to be able to compel police officers to testify at a hearing if need be.
- David Harris: How can we incorporate ASL training for the police?

- Jessica Benham: It's broadly good for people in society to learn a little bit of ASL, but deaf people have the right to an ASL interpreter when interacting with police. So, if the ASL interpreter was no longer necessary, that would pose a problem for that deaf person. Maybe the police should know if they're interacting someone who knows ASL, because then they could get an interpreter for them.
- Darryl Holts: Before training, the community needs to talk about how a deaf person or a mute person can communicate effectively with law enforcement so it won't end up being a tragedy.
- Richard Garland: Are you suggesting that mental health or social workers could go out on calls with police officers?
 - Darryl Holts: I'm not suggesting that. It's out there now, but mental health has a lot of moving parts, and you can't subject mental health workers in police officer's line of work because that just presents issues.
 - Jessica Benham: There are people in the disability community who would like to see that. From my perspective, I think it's important for people to have the services they need, so those calls don't even have to happen. The argument I hear from folks in the community is, if something happens on that call, will the blowback be any different from the calls where a police officer is injured?
- Valerie McDonald Roberts: Have you all ever had a conversation with the disability section within the Department of City Planning?
 - Jessica Benham: I have, and I lead autism training for first responders. It wasn't just for new officers, but for those who have been around for a long time. I think the difficulty is reaching the officers that don't have the mindset of "I want to learn how to deal with these issues."
- Valerie McDonald Roberts: Are there ID bracelets or any type of identification for those with intellectual disabilities or mental illness?
 - Jessica Benham: Some people do carry an ID card that lists their type of disability and what to know about it. Also, I was working on a bill with a Senator that would allow for a specific marking on driver's licenses which would identify the disability.

**Presentation II: "Immigrant and Refugee Communities as it Relates to Policing",
Presented by Jose Diaz, Kheir Mugwaneza, and Dr. Yinka Aganga-Williams**

- Immigrant and refugee communities as they relate to policing
- Immigrant community in Pittsburgh is growing and is extremely diverse
- Communication
 - Very important, especially for those who don't speak English at all or not well
 - Some individuals come from drastically different cultures, so they need to be told how the US differs from their country of origin in terms of policing
 - How do you improve communication?

- Interpretation, and connecting with people who are in these communities
 - Community liaisons
 - Can work with the police
- Understanding the uniqueness and diversity among refugees and immigrants
 - In the last few years, the focus was on Bhutanese refugees, but now it's moved to Congolese refugees
 - We need to be able to adjust to handling the different cultures, the waves of refugees change every few years
- Language
 - You find someone on the street as a police officer and you want to help, but you can't even communicate with that person
- Police need better training to understand the different immigrant and refugee communities they interact with
 - Just because they don't speak English does not mean they are illegal immigrants
 - Training, information, and connections between the communities and officers are critical
- Often times, literature distributed in school isn't being produced in multiple languages to meet those household needs
 - Students are put in a unique position; they'll have to translate texts and documents for their parents
 - Because of this, parents are missing out on opportunities like parent-teacher conferences, community meetings, etc.
 - If a child gets involved with the law, how are law enforcement telling parents this important information?
- Foreign born population in Pittsburgh is 8%, and it's growing
- Some folks may look like they speak English, but they can't
 - So, police will assume they're noncompliant, and they're often people of color
- How can we educate people before we arrest people?
 - Sometimes a simple traffic stop can get someone killed or deported

Q&A

- David Harris: The suggestions by Kheir for a community liaison are absolutely crucial, just to touch on that. We can do that here. Also, cultural training is so important, I can't stress that enough. The question I want to ask is what you know about if Pittsburgh Police are just handing people over to ICE?
 - Monica Ruiz: They don't have a relationship with ICE, but the County Jail sometimes give information to ICE, which is illegal. Once you're out of Pittsburgh Police's hands, there's nothing they can do, ICE might just take them.
- Sharon Werner: I understand we do have community liaisons, but can anyone tell me how many we have, do they have cultural training, etc.?

- Alaa Mohamed: An RFP just went out to get cultural competency training, and it's just been extended by 3 weeks. The vendor would work with immigrant communities, so that the training itself is informed directly by these communities. The training isn't just for the police, it's for all of Public Safety.
- Monica Ruiz: When the police are in the academy, they do have some form of training, but that was years ago when I learned that. The training should be ongoing, not just something you have once.
- Lindsay Powell: Sharon, I think you're referring to the NRO and CRO programs. They're not civilian liaisons, but officers who are working directly with communities. They're trained officers, and Welcoming Pittsburgh has had conversations surrounding what the program should look like in the future. For example, should civilian liaisons work directly with officers.
- Angela Reynolds: Do you have any thoughts on what the barriers are for those in the communities who try to join the academy?
 - Kheir Mugwaneza: If the police could come into the communities and directly tell them what the requirements are, it would help that way. Some of the folks don't know what the requirements are. It's a very challenging process, so making it easier perhaps, or at least better communicating with these communities, would help the process.
- Tim Stevens: I'm going to ask the same request of our guests in this part of our call as I did of the previous guests, regarding you providing us with as much information as you can. My question is, is the immigrant community aware of that document, and is it in any language other than English?
 - Kheir Mugwaneza: I'm not aware of that document. I know other documents have been translated, but I'm not sure which one you're referring to.
 - Alaa Mohamed: We can get that document translated.
 - Yinka Aganga-Williams: Can you forward that so we can determine if that document is relevant to the immigrant community?
 - Tim Stevens: Most certainly.
- Richard Garland: If there's stuff going on at the Allegheny County Jail Monica, like you referred to, can you get me more information on that?
 - Monica Ruiz: Yes, I can, the Jail just won't stop doing it.
 - Richard Garland: Email me after this, we can talk more about this.
- Yinka Aganga-Williams
 - One last comment before this Q&A is done. It took us a long time to get police chiefs to the table. But when they did come, it wasn't us who spoke. It was the immigrant community who came forward. This is how we found out things were improving. We may need another discussion like this with the higher-ups. Community meetings with law enforcement is absolutely vital to these discussions we've been having.

Reporting: How will we integrate the subcommittees into one voice?

- Quintin Bullock: After we present each report, we can discuss the content of each report. When they are all completed, a small writing team will work to put all the information and reports into one report. The report will be sent out to the Taskforce to review prior to the scheduled taskforce meeting. The taskforce will review and discuss the report and agree on the final document.
- Sharon Werner: I don't know if there's a format we want to go by, but maybe we can have it as "here who we talked to, here's what the police are currently doing, and here are our recommendations for the short-term and long-term"
- Bobbi Watt Geer: I think it'd be helpful if each subcommittee advances their recommendations so we can read over all of them before we come to a full meeting. That way we can make adjustments before we compile it all. We should also include a list of guest presenters, those who informed the process as it advanced.
- Valerie McDonald Robert: Don't feel the weight of having to compile a list of recommendations, etc. Please feel free to pull some staff to help with this process. The goal is to have a seamless report with a consistent format. A list of recommendations with facts or whatever should be included.
- Angela Reynolds: Since we've started, a lot of things have happened. How are we factoring in the policies and legislation that have passed through City Council?
 - Quintin Bullock: We can reaffirm, where necessary, what City Council passed; but the taskforce may not recommend everything the Council passed.
- Tim Stevens: Are we assuming the structure of the report will be in categories?
 - Quintin Bullock: That's what we're discussing. We're gathering recommendations from taskforce members.
- David Harris: I want to answer a little bit of Angela's question, we have resolutions that became City law that address the use of force area. The Mayor also address 8 Can't Wait, etc. We should incorporate these things to the report. They may already be law, but they're nice supports for what we're already going to do.
- Bobbi Watt Geer: We should be clear in the introductory section of the report about what exactly it is, and what it is not. As we put the report together, we should be clear about those things.
- Richard Garland: I think we have to be careful. I agree with what people have said thus far, but some people in the community think that this group doesn't have teeth to it, or that it's not really at the heart of the matter. I'm worried that this group was just put together so they could justify some of the things that have been passed in the City Council.
- Nathaniel Yap: I was just going to respond to Richard's comments. I understand the concerns he's raising; we don't want to appear like a rubber stamp for what the City's passed. Weighing in on these various pieces of legislation and providing our thoughts on

them would be inherently valuable. Maybe we want to push it even further, we can think about the legislation at every level of government.

- David Harris: As I envision what the use of force sections will look like, we'll be pushing beyond what the legislation even touched on.
- Sharon Werner: Have we figured out our timing yet?
- Quintin Bullock: Timing is flexible, we want to allow adequate time to gather input from our community constituents to be heard. We'll take time to work in our subcommittees until the members feel as though they've exhausted what they can talk about. Then we'll talk about it as a whole group, and go on from there. I ask that we keep working and preparing your summary of work and recommendations.
- Tim Stevens: Did we agree collectively that our goal is to have the most comprehensive package we can find? That Pittsburgh will have one of the most comprehensive police reform packages in the country?
- Quintin Bullock: Yes, that's our goal.
- Tim Stevens: I think we should aim for Labor Day. In our subcommittees, if we can really get this work done, that'd be great.
- Quintin Bullock: That's what everyone is doing.
- Valerie McDonald Roberts: Let's not be naïve in thinking that this will be the best thing since sliced bread, there will be people who aren't impressed with it at all. As long as we accomplish, we were charged to do, then I'm satisfied with that. My concern is generating an excellent report. It's not a song and dance, it'll probably be boring to most people.
- Quintin Bullock: It's getting late so we'll end it here. Thank you all for your continued efforts.