

Police Reform Task Force Meeting

August 17, 2020

Attendance

Task Force Members: Joy LeViere, David Harris, Angela Reynolds, Richard Garland, Valerie McDonald Roberts (co-chair), Tony Beltran, Dr. Quintin Bullock (co-chair), Patricia Leftwich, Nathaniel Yap, Sharon Werner, Tim Stevens, Amanda Green-Hawkins, Rabbi Ron Symons

Guests: Professor Lynda Williams (NOBLE National President), Dr. Joseph A. McMillan (Past NOBLE National President), Paris Pratt Sr. (Assistant Special Agent in Charge, U.W. Drug Enforcement Administration, Pittsburgh District Office), Lavonnie Bickerstaff (Assistant Chief, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police), Theodore W. Johnson (Chairman, Board of Probation and Parole), Ernest W. Withrow (Pittsburgh Chapter President), Maurita Bryant (Retired Assistant Superintendent, Allegheny County Police),

Staff: William Lamar, Alexander Fisher, Hersh Merenstein (Local Gov. and Community Relations Coordinator), Alaa Mohamed (Policy Coordinator), Rebecca Glickman (Intern), Shatara Murphy (Department of Public Safety), Lindsay Powell (Assistant Chief of Staff)

“National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives” (NOBLE) Presentation

- No intention of addressing any specific issues occurring in Allegheny County or Pittsburgh, but happy to answer questions
- Only through open communication will there truly be positive change in police reform
- **Linda Williams**, retired as deputy assistant director in the secret service. She now serves as 43rd national president of NOBLE
 - NOBLE joins nation in condemning police actions and inaction leading to the death of George Floyd
 - Justice must be fair, transparent and equal
 - Important that officers involved are prosecuted, but also that structural issues are addressed
 - It would help improve public safety to increase trust and transparency
 - NOBLE supports modernizing policing by: Prohibition on chokeholds, implementation of national registry for those who have been dismissed from any agency, mandatory de-escalation/ implicit bias training, limitation on qualified immunity, requirements from body worn cameras, national record of use of force by law enforcement, etc.
 - Recognizes many police officers who courageously serve their communities and dedicate themselves to the implementation of modern policing
 - Calls on congress to implement effective 21st century policing
 - Acknowledge need for comprehensive and holistic change
- **Dr. Joseph McMillan**, retired law enforcement official with the secret service, post-doctoral fellow
 - “If we can’t see a problem, we can’t fix a problem”

- What does true reform look like?
 - NOBLE believes a comprehensive approach is needed to address police culture
 - Engages in advancing 21st century policing developed by President Obama
 - Need to establish clear set of expectations
 - Police disciplinary action must be open for public review
 - 21st century policing task force pillars
 - Building trust and legitimacy
 - Policy and oversight
 - Community policing and crime reduction
 - Polarity of democracy theory- uses democracy to address issues of oppression
 - Interdependent pairs that are ongoing and cannot be solved by choosing one of the poles as a solution; both end polarities depend on both poles through the process (ex: justice and due process)
 - NOBLE has embarked on mission to develop policies in line with 21st policing and transform culture of the police
- **Paris Pratt Sr.**, Assistant Special Agent in Charge at the DEA
 - In order to change something you have to do it from the inside
 - DEA has 231 domestic officers, 93 international officers
 - Pittsburgh was pilot office for 360 strategy
 - Objective to have more of a community impact, change attitudes
- **Ted Johnson**, Chairman, Board of Probation and Parole. He previously served as the Chief of Federal Probation for Western PA.
 - Heavily involved in re-entry court, drug court
 - Trying to help ex-offenders to come out and engage in employment
 - 2016 SC vs. Miller- said we are no longer able to sentence juveniles to life in prison
 - Since then, BPP has paroled 300 of juvenile lifers already in prison before decision
 - Very passionate about Mad Dads- coordinates with law enforcement and become a nuisance to those causing a nuisance
 - Shows up regarding trouble in the high schools (fights, etc.)
 - Go out and hang out in areas of trouble
 - Common theme for all successes= collaboration
 - Law enforcement, community, and all other agencies need to collaborate
- **Ernest Withrow**, Chapter President for NOBLE Pittsburgh
 - Stresses justice by action
 - It is important for people to state their position, go into the community and protest
 - Recommendation to have police department and other authorities actually on the ground in the community (they are welcome at all NOBLE meetings)
- **Lavonnie Bickerstaff**, Assistant Chief and a 20+ year member of NOBLE
 - Pittsburgh Plan for Peace
 - In the last 5 years PBP has dropped the crime rate by 30%
 - Community outreach includes open houses, reading at barber shops, fireside chats, Office of Community Engagement, Zone 5 community open house, public safety community meetings, Town Hall meetings

- **Maurita Bryant**, retired assistant Superintendent, Allegheny County Police
 - There has been a lot of reform. There was a time where police didn't see an issue with minority communities.
 - It takes a level of cooperation on both sides for police to be able to go out and engage with communities.
 - President Obama's 21st century policing is a template for ALL police departments to follow
 - All we have to do is put 3 tenets into place
 - Outrage about arrest of protester in Oakland this past Saturday
 - Sometimes to de-escalate a situation, you have to use whatever resources are available to you as quick as possible
 - "you need the police and the police need you," get away from 'them against us' mentality
 - Law enforcement has to communicate with the community, has to listen
 - The answers don't always lie in the stats
 - Need to all sit in a room together, get it all out with frank dialogue

Discussion

- Patricia- Zero tolerance was not demonstrated at protest on Saturday, undermines what task force is working on
 - Maurita- don't stop working because one negative incident. Do what needs to be done to fix it.
- Valerie- Can you share anything in addition to the Mayor's statement about the incident on Saturday?
 - Ms. Bickerstaff- can only discuss the statement
- David- Group violence initiative; how does this work? Who runs it?
 - Ms. Bickerstaff- a part of 21st century policing, started in 2015, focuses in on all non-fatal shootings, police & young outreach workers working together to keep the violence down
- Angela- Are there issues the police undertake now that can possibly be diverted to other groups (human services, social services, etc)? What is NOBLE's reaction to this approach?
 - Mr. Johnson- would need to be some sort of collaboration, is unsure what kind of call wouldn't require law enforcement
 - Ms. Bryant- there are initiatives already starting here in Allegheny County, DHS is doing something; can only see police always being nearby in case call become violent (groups can respond together)
 - Patricia- Maybe we need specialized police (officer for mental health calls, officer for overdose calls, etc)?
 - Ms. Bryant- there are certain officers that have specialized CIT training ; there are only so many officers, sometimes pulled from one call to another, this is why specialized civilian help would be desired to take the burden off of police
- Tim- How do you build trust between the police and the community? How do you reduce crime rates?
 - Dr. McMillan- trust is built over time through interaction, communication, conversation (sustained engagement)

- Police need to be ‘married’ to the communities they serve (ex: police in schools could have positive outcomes of youth engagement)
 - It is through community actions, everyone coming to the table
 - You are always one incident away from eroding trust and legitimacy
 - The longer bad officers stay on the job, the worse trust and respect will become
 - Implement programs to prevent this from happening (early warning, etc)
 - Mr. Johnson- recruitment within communities; more youth being recruited within their own community/ interested in coming into law enforcement who know their own communities well and are respected/ trusted there
 - How do we do this? Westinghouse ROTC but for firefighters; law enforcement clubs, social work clubs that connect youth at a young age to parts of law enforcement that they don’t see; has to be ongoing, consistent
 - Dr. McMillan- law enforcement explorer program with the right leaders (other officers from that community)
 - Ms. Bryant- there are NOBLE chapters in collegiate settings
 - Interested in starting one at University of Pittsburgh (will connect with Patricia)
- Richard- There has to be something said about the event that happened at the protest this weekend. Transparency is crucial. The task force should create and put out a statement.
 - Ms. Bryant- transparency has changed, automatic response used to just be ‘no comment’
 - Hoping that more programs like the one mentioned will be implemented in schools and universities
 - Mr. Johnson- Juvenile probation did a program (DMC, Disproportionate Minority Contact) connecting youth with police officers, Wilksburg does a police academy (some of the Mad Dads have participated in this to have a better understanding of the other side); takes people sitting down and not pointing fingers
 - Mr. Conte from Duquesne is going into the penitentiary and talking to the inmates, has garnered positive outcomes (NOBLE is a part of this)
- Valerie- Ms. Lavonnie can you figure out who developed the public safety curriculum in the public schools and if there has been a review of it?
- Nathaniel- We are emphasizing change in culture (warrior>>guardian model)? What do you see are important steps in adoption of these changes? How do we reconcile adoption of this guardian model within PBP when we have examples of police misconduct still occurring (example from the protest)?
 - Chief Bickerstaff- the police understand that change is needed, most effective change can be made by informal leaders within the zones (sergeants, patrol officers, etc), but also from top-down leadership
- Rabbi Symons- US police force was designed to capture escaped slaves. Is there legitimacy to this historical perspective?
 - Dr. McMillan- there is historical legitimacy to this, we have to see the problem to change it
 - Ms. Williams- we have to acknowledge and address our history before we can overcome it, this requires a collaborative effort, just because one does not experience it does not negate its existence

- Ron- I cannot imagine being a black resident of Pittsburgh and knowing that truth and continuing to acknowledge police
- Tony- going back to question Angela asked about unbundling: can someone walk us through how to identify what are the types of calls that police officers are inappropriately responding to?
 - Ms. Bryant- a lot of issues within schools can be resolved without police intervention, truancy issues, some calls for overdose cases
 - Ms. Bickerstaff- burglar alarms, parking complaints, many traffic stops, homeless issues, certain types of mental health calls
 - Missing person calls need to be handled by police (often attempted to lump this into non-police response)
- Ms. Bickerstaff- Active Bystander Training (ABLE) that police are currently receiving relates to transforming to guardian model of police culture

Task Force Only Discussion

Taskforce Statement for the August 15 event at the Corner of Forbes Ave. and S. Bouquet St.

“The Pittsburgh Community Task Force of Police Reform strongly condemns the actions of a non-uniformed group of Pittsburgh police officers at the corner of Forbes Ave. and S. Bouquet St. on August 15. We have heard from countless members of our community, include law enforcement officers and those exercising their First Amendment rights to protest, who are desperate for these policing tactics to change now. As we continue our work as a Task Force, we pledge to address such police tactics in our final report, and we call on Mayor Peduto, Public Safety Director Hisrich, and Chief Schubert to immediately address this incident and provide full transparency to the community. We also call on the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police and protest leaders to work together to ensure the safety of everyone involved.”

The statement was sent out immediately following the taskforce meeting to various media outlets and through social media.