

Police Reform Task Force Meeting
August 24, 2020

Attendance

Taskforce Members: Dr. David Harris, Dr. Angela Reynolds, Richard Garland, Valerie McDonald Roberts (co-chair), Tony Beltran, Dr. Quintin Bullock (co-chair), Sylvia Fields, Nathaniel Yap, Sharon Werner, Tim Stevens, Amanda Green-Hawkins, Rabbi Ron Symons, Dr. Bobbi Watt-Geer,

Guests: Tiffini Simoneaux (Youth & Education Manager), Ciora Thomas (President and Founder, SisTers TGH), Dr. Anupama Jain (Executive Director, Gender Equity Commission),

Staff: Alexander Fisher, Hersh Merenstein (Local Gov. and Community Relations Coordinator), David Finer, Alaa Mohamed (Policy Coordinator), Joy LeViere, Lindsay Powell (Assistant Chief of Staff), Mairead McCarthy (Welcoming Pittsburgh VISTA)

LGBTQIA+ Advisory Council Q&A with Tiffini Simoneaux (Youth & Education Manager-Mayor's Office) and Ciora Thomas (President and Founder, SisTers PGH).

The Youth Advisory Council was formed in December 2016 with a goal to become a Commission. The Commission is approved by City Council and applications for 8 spots are now open. Ciora Thomas serves as President of the Advisory Council. She founded and directs SisTersPGH, which provides resources for transgender and non-binary people. SisTers has a community center in Swissvale, and provides housing through Project T. Ciora also serves as co-vice chair for PA Commission on LGBTQ Affairs.

Q&A begins:

- Nathaniel: What are your top concerns as it pertains to interactions with PPB and the LGBTQIA+ community?
 - Tiffini: The Public Safety Committee under the LGBTQIA+ Advisory Council met with Commander Holmes. They were impressed that SOGIE training was required for new oncoming members (but not for all members). The officers that joined several years ago don't receive that training.
 - The Public Safety Committee made the recommendation that all PPB personnel should receive SOGIE training.
 - Ciora: We have had interactions with police through protests and individual client contacts. One thing that sticks out are "prostitution stings," altercations involving sex workers.
 - Sex workers (often LGBTQIA and Black or Brown) are coerced into sex work due to economic need, like unstable housing, food insecurity, and discrimination.
 - Criminalizing sex workers puts them further in harm's way. ACJ is not safe. Charging sex workers takes away resources from the people who need resources the most.
 - The media sensationalizes and dehumanizes sex workers in their reporting.
 - Sometimes, the media outs/identify these individuals (as sex workers, homeless, trans).

- Sex workers are also victims of violence. They are stigmatized by police. They don't reach out when they experience harm.
 - Ciora speaks from her own lived experience as former sex worker and a formerly homeless person.
- Angela: When we talk about Black Lives Matter, we need to talk about all Black lives, including sex workers and trans people. These stories are not being heard on the national level. What other concerns are there, Ciora?
 - Ciora: Accountability for police officers who fail to protect and serve.
 - There needs to be an easy tool to police the police.
 - There are officers who have sexually assaulted LGBTQ people. I speak for the victims through my role within the City and State. What about people who don't have these roles?
 - Ciora: SOGIE trainings and trainings from trans people.
 - An officer might not agree with a person's identity. Efforts/policies should be put in place to prevent their beliefs from coming into their job. This training needs to happen for all police.
 - SisTers PGH provides trainings on how to include and respect trans people, how to use pronouns.
 - Ciora: The Police need to respect Pittsburgh pride.
 - When we ask for no police at pride, that should not be an argument. LGBTQ people and the police have had a riff since the beginning of LGBTQ liberation. This history must be acknowledged and respected.
 - This conversation must lead to tangible solutions and action items. This is not the first Task Force or Panel Ciora has presented to.
- Tim: are you involved now with training the PPB?
 - Ciora: no. we worked with ACJ and the officers in the jail about 2 years ago but those conversations stopped because a trans woman giving the training was met with transphobic remarks. The police receiving the training joked and laughed at her so that relationship was broken. We were doing this training for free.
- Tim: Did you try to correct that relationship?
 - Ciora: this was a situation of an abuse of power, it was not our responsibility to repair the relationship, it was the police's.
- Tim: asks for a summary point fashion "what you would want to see happen and why" as soon as possible. cav.pgh@gmail.com
- Valerie: When the news media announces there's been a "prostitution thing" and there was a trans person involved, is this the news reporting their opinions? Or are they reading from police reports? So the news lifts the information from the police report (Ciora nodding). Ok what about reporting rape? Do people report?
 - Ciora: It's case by case. People report if they feel compelled. Some are intimidated that they don't want to report to the same people that violated them.
- Valerie: Where do you find the most complaints? Individual incidents or groups?
 - Ciora: Both at pride protests and also from individuals alone in cars with police
- Valerie: When did the women who provided training get insulted?
 - Ciora: That was 2 years ago. There was a working group called "Public Safety Committee" under the LGBTQIA+ Advisory council.
 - Ciora: Not sure if it was recorded. There was a social media post.

- Tiffini: Commander Holmes was involved in conversations about this.
 - Ciora and Tiffini: Will reach out to follow up.
- Tim: From your perspective, how could trainings be set up to avoid such interactions between the presenter and the police, if there was an incident again, how should it be approached?
 - Ciora: This behavior should be not tolerated. The person should be fired for being transphobic. If they're not willing to sit down and learn how to protect and serve, then they should be fired.
- Richard Garland: What is a sex worker and how do they interact with police?
 - Ciora: A sex worker is a person who is forced by the economy to use sex as an economic tool. This is criminalized by the police. In fact, the police and government officials participate, and solicit these services. We need to make sure that sex workers are safe doing their job.
- Nathaniel: Police are often the ones to respond to sex work situations. In an ideal world, who should respond to these situations? Are there alternate services? Do we have them or are they modeled somewhere?
 - Ciora: I haven't seen any here. We need a domestic violence hotline or a central space to go to that is affirming, not the police. Perhaps, maybe a task force to report to first. This should include domestic and sexual violence in the LGBTQ community.
- Nathaniel: Do you envision someone who has expertise in homelessness helping in this situation?
 - Ciora: It might be helpful, but you need to expand your expectations. Expertise in homelessness also means formerly homeless persons. Those with lived experience hold key knowledge, and empowering those who have already gone through the experience should be uplifted.
- Bobbi: Thank you for both joining us. I'd like to circle back to accountability. Ciora you mentioned that its difficult to make reports to police who you already have an issue with. What might help? What kind of accountability mechanism or body would help?
 - Ciora: What registers in my head is to fire them. We should not allow folks to abuse an individual with their power.
 - Trainings don't work. I've seen officers go through trainings and think they come out different but they don't. They're human beings and they know how to play the system. They should not continue to harm the people they serve. This has been going on since before I was born. They receive training and then next week they're still transphobic. The action has been made with no results.
- Bobbi: Would it make a difference if the accountability body doesn't have police officers involved in the investigation?
 - Ciora: Yes, an independent investigation is the best route to go because you don't have the police protecting the police.
- Sylvia Fields: Is this a recruitment issue too? It's embedded, we have to do a better job fielding those who want to be a police officer, and need to screen them and weed those with transphobic attitudes out. I recognize some people can transform, but for the most part people stay the way they are.

- Ciora: yes, a couple years ago I read about a trans officer being brought onto the force. Everyone thought that we'd be more inclusive! But the trans officer was having difficulty being around the transphobic police.
- Ron Symmons: Ciora, are there other communities doing better than Pittsburgh? Is there a correlation between the police having trans force and how they interact with the lgbtq communities?
 - Ciora: I haven't seen that as being a reality. The trans officer I read about was the only one I'd heard about ever.
- Ron: So which community is doing it better?
 - Ciora: It's sad to say, but there is not one. Our history is rooted in this riff. Many people don't understand the bureaucratic differences between the ACJ officers and the police, so any blame gets shared across the blue. Again, this is not a situation that needs to be fixed by the LGBTQ community, it should be the police repairing their interactions and their reputation.
- Angela: For either of you: is the citizens police review board a place where the LGBTQ community can go?
 - Tiffini: I know of some cases that have been filed, but I think the awareness isn't there and people are concerned about the retribution (is it anonymous, will I be prosecuted for my actions), especially the fear of police being in the name, the fear is permeating. So there needs to be more work about the confidentiality of the process, and the awareness of what could be brought to the citizens police review board (what types of things I can take there)
 - Ciora: Make sure you have LGBTQ representation on these boards.
- Tim: Tiffini, how do you get around the security of names if people are bringing forth a complaint that someone needs to sign? To your knowledge, is there anyone from the organizations that are involved in the police trainings still?
 - Tiffini: No, there are no LGBTQIA+ trainings being given by local groups. There's a national SOGIE training given. This is a train the trainer method, but if the trainer doesn't have lived experience, you lose out on a lot.
- Valerie: We can ask about the psych training to HR. There are police officers who are not biased, and many many that are. Has there ever been a convening of non-biased officers?
 - Ciora: No not in my experience. Some may reach out individually.
- Tim: Have there been conversations about decriminalizing sex work?
 - Ciora: yes, this is an ongoing conversation in other cities.
 - Tiffini: Some cities have decriminalized it, and some have stopped STING operations. We will send these in the recommendations.
- Amanda: Re: policy change with sex work. This may be worth having a conversation with the DA's office, and get them to agree to stop prosecuting sex workers. Then police will be less likely to pick up sex workers.

Gender Equity Commission Presentation by Dr. Anupama Jain (Executive Director, Gender Equity Commission)

- Valerie: Anu has worked at The City since 2017. The Gender Equity Commission was legislated by former councilwoman Natalia Rudiak.
- Anu: [GEC presentation](#). (These slides give you access to data on city that can be helpful.)

- Legacies of gender based bias still exist. The GEC was created to transform activist social justice vision into policy. This is the City's newest commission, is open to the public.
- We are committed to gender equity for all women. These are human issues, not women's issues: we are all impacted by gender.
- The GEC is a mostly volunteer group. They produced policy recommendations "Building an Equitable New Normal." Number 1, addressing police violence, summarized:
 - Policing needs to be community based.
 - Gender arises in patterns of police brutality against women (Black and trans)
 - Implicit bias training needs to be ongoing.
 - Need for more awareness for domestic and intimate partner violence. This doesn't even touch upon when the police are the perpetrators
 - Diversifying police. We used to have court ordered hiring quotas, but they were lifted and then the diversity fell.
 - Inclusive environment preventing stereotyping and harassment. Women report that this is the culture currently.
 - Mentoring opportunities for women and BIPOC
 - Transparent and equitable policies around pregnancy, family leave etc.
 - #SayHerName African American policy forum
 - Research about police reform must be intersectional. Body cam legislation must take into concern gender based violence.
 - Questions to ask police to measure the effect of changes.
- Angela Reynolds: Quick comment. BET Saturday at 11 will be airing Anu addressing the #SayHerName movement. Question on recommendation #2 collecting data and #4 prioritizing services for women/etc. How can the task force support this?
 - Anu: One of the reasons the GEC exists is because of the wide gender gap in data. For example, the car safety tests done with male dummies. That is a persistent longstanding problem. We don't have data. How do we have a common system for collecting that? There is a concern that data will be used to further marginalize people or target people, but there are systems where we can be thoughtful. We're at the beginning of doing this, we are starting. The GEC is working on community based participatory research. #4: we are working across city depts to lower the structural barriers. Trying to make a one stop shop for services. Eliminate bureaucracy.
- David Harris: Interested in the hiring of women, and transition to guardian culture. You get those guardian qualities when you hire more women because as a group they have more interest in de-escalation. The last number for PPB is 16% women officers in 2015. Are there active efforts PPB recruit women? Is the GEC talking to the current female officers now to gauge whether things are getting worse/better?
 - Anu: Yes, the numbers are now lower. We have not gotten better. My understanding about systematic hiring is that there is none. I have been in touch informally with the women and LGBTQ officers and the mild term is that it is a hostile atmosphere. Mentoring and recruitment done together could address this, but another issue is that it's unclear how women can achieve leadership roles.
- Ron Symons: What's the target number? Which other police departments are doing it well?
 - Anu: I will share models with the co-chairs.

- Anu: An ideal we can aspire to is that all of our leaders and front line people more fairly represent the communities. 52% female is not a bad aspiration, but we are a ways away from that. But it also means that our police force is not all white, but we also need to make sure that we are not throwing minorities into a hostile environment.
- Bobbi: Circling back to data questions. Where is the data? How can we get aggregated data? How can we make decisions about communities without data? How can we structure a recommendation to collect this data?
 - Anu: This is a challenge. In the past, we have not really tracked well or systematically or humanely in order to say we are making progress. I have a vision that we do this in a dovetail way, partner with others, like universities, to help us do this work. We can ask peoples identities in a sensitive way. And we can uplift the people able to do this in our community.
- Tim: I would like to focus on recruitment and training. We are going out of existence as a group but we want to make sure we leave a long lasting legacy. Please share your recommendations.
 - Anu: I will send the follow up

Task Force Only Discussion

- Tim: How will these recommendations be compiled? How do we acknowledge those that offered input?
 - We can sort the recommendations by topic, give a general recommendation or list other individuals.
- Valerie: How do we move forward?
 - Each subcommittee should prepare their report based on the input heard. We will disseminate reports for taskforce members to review prior the meeting. This will allow members time to review the document and gather their thoughts and recommendations.
 - We will do our very best to be as detailed and precise as possible
 - We will try to make comments only on content and not wording.
- Bobbi: Scale is going to be an issue when these reports come together. We all have different amounts of information available. We've also had a variety of speakers who intersect in our subcommittees. In the end, we want a final report that is readable and actionable.
- Angela: Who is the actual synthesizer? Embedding links, formatting, etc.
 - Dr Bullock will work with staff to help finalized the proposal. Additional assistance will be requested as needed.
- Tony: We've had lots of great recommendations from a variety of speakers. How do we make sure we capture all of them?
 - Alaa: Minutes and speaker recommendations are available in the Google drive. The report will also include a section on acknowledgements.

Dr Bullock and Angela: We can use the next meeting for subcommittees to work. Each subcommittee will compile their list of recommendations and forward them to Dr. Bullock by noon on Monday, August 31st. There will not be a public zoom meeting on Monday.