



CITY OF POUGHKEEPSIE PROCEDURAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Procedural Justice Committee Releases Recommendations Regarding Governor's Executive Order on Police Reforms

The City of Poughkeepsie Procedural Justice Committee appreciates the opportunity to have a role in the city's response to Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Executive Order No. 203 regarding police reforms.

The Procedural Justice Committee met with the Mayor, Police Chief and Captain Wilson on Oct. 6, 2020, to discuss what is needed from the committee to assist with the police reform plan. The committee, which consists of community stakeholders and police officers, was asked to gather recommendations, suggestions and ideas from the community and discuss among the committee members what should be included in the police reform plan that would be drafted by the Police Department.

The committee hosted a Community Forum on Police Reform on Oct. 27, 2020 and a youth focus group on Dec. 1 (Originally scheduled for November 17 but cancelled due to COVID issues). The youth focus group consist of seven young people between the ages of 14-18 who had some type of interactions with the police.

Based on discussions within the Procedural Justice Committee meetings, community forums, comments sent to the committee, the recommendations to be considered when drafting the police reform plan are as follows:

Create Civilian Oversight: There needs to be an independent board to investigate or review complaints. Complainants should be given a place to voice concerns outside of the law enforcement agency, and the community should be reassured that discipline is being imposed when appropriate. The transparency of the disciplinary process also must be improved.

City officials should continue to work with City Administration and PBA collaboratively on creating such a board that will work for everyone, but operates independently from the police department. A series of questions will need to be addressed, which consist of the following:

Should the board review the findings of the Police Department or conduct its own investigation? Other issues that need addressing include what power should the board have to interview officers or other witnesses, to compel officers or other witnesses to be interviewed, and to review documents, recordings, interviews conducted by the police department or other evidence? What authority would it have over discipline and can it formally refer cases to the Attorney General or District Attorney or Trial Commission (which is referred to in the City Charter)?

The Dutchess County's Police Reform & Modernization Collaborative cites several approaches to consider:

— The New York City board is composed of 13 members: Five appointed by the Mayor, five appointed by the City Council, and three appointed by the Police Commissioner. The board has power to investigate complaints, including subpoena power, and can recommend discipline. However, the Police Commissioner has final authority over the imposition of discipline.

— The Chicago board is composed of nine members appointed by the Mayor with the consent of the City Council. The board has investigative and subpoena power, and power to impose disciplinary measures.

— The Baltimore board is composed of nine voting members nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council, along with five non-voting members from community stakeholders. The board does not have power to investigate or impose discipline. It may simply review complaints.

Other websites were suggested by the committee to review in regards to creating an oversight board:

<https://cops.usdoj.gov>

<https://www.ncjrs.gov>

<https://www.nacole.org>

jisp.law.columbia.edu

Bolster Additional Mental Health Partnerships: The City of Poughkeepsie and Mental Health America of Dutchess County have undertaken a pilot program under which a behavioral health professional is embedded in the department to provide case management services to those in need. We understand the initial work has proven promising, and we believe this partnership should be expanded. A behavioral health professional who is trained to handle youth mental health situations should be considered to be part of the team.

Improve the Complaint Form: These forms are used when the public has questions about police procedures and policies. The city has now made the form available online at <http://cityofpoughkeepsie.com/police-department>, but the city should make the form more understandable and easier to use, including an introduction at the beginning of the form that explains how the form and process work. Submitted forms are to be reviewed by a member of the command staff and assigned to the appropriate supervisor for action. The public needs more information about the outcome of these cases and the rationale for the decision. Until a Civilian

Oversight board is created, a mediation between the officer and complainant should be considered as part of the complaint process.

Create More Diversity in Ranks: Police academy applicants are required to have a minimum of 60 college credits. We believe Dutchess County is making the proper move by changing the college credit requirement, giving new officers more time to achieve those 60 credits within five years and complete crisis intervention training within two years. The city Police Department needs more people of color in the ranks and also more bilingual officers. This should be a priority as much as possible during recruitment efforts. We recommend during the recruitment efforts the police department to work closely with organizations that have a close connection to diverse populations. Also, as part of the career law enforcement course held for youths every year, a mentorship component should be considered to help encourage more youths in the area to consider becoming police officers in the city.

Also, to encourage the police officers to be more invested in the community they serve, it is recommended the officers live in the City of Poughkeepsie or no further than 5-10 miles. Currently, police officers can live as far as 20 miles outside of the city. What is also recommended is creating a “City Preferred List,” in which officers who live in the City of Poughkeepsie would be considered first to be hired off the Civil Service list. The preferred list should be exhausted first and then move on to the rest of the County list. Also, the police department should carefully evaluate their hiring process to ensure the process does not limit hiring a diverse police workforce.

Increase Community Policing: The Police Department has designated two officers to community policing addressing quality-of-life issues around the Main Street corridor. Community policing keeps officers patrolling the same area in order to form a stronger bond with the citizens living and working there. We believe the department should add such patrols to other neighborhoods throughout the city, especially in neighborhoods experiencing high levels of crime where collaboration and trust is needed between police officers and residents to ensure safety.

Keep School Resource Officer: While some may question why there should be a police presence in school, we believe it builds relationships and can help stem violence in and around the schools. The SRO Program has been known to create a safer school environment and bridge the communication and trust gap between youth and law enforcement, establishing a channel of communication that can make all the difference in school and later in life for youth. Recommend more collaborative programs between the schools and police that involve middle school students and continue programs already established on the elementary school levels such as Cocoa with the Cops program. Young children experiencing more positive interactions with police officers can create better trusting relationships as the children progress toward adulthood.

Safe Passage: The Police Department must continue to work with the School District and community members to come out with better plans to deal with safe passage of students to and from schools. Volunteers should be posted in “hot spots” throughout the neighborhood as kids are leaving school to deter and report potential violence. We recommend reinstating the Civilian Patrol program and provide the necessary training so these civilian officers can assist with traffic control, safe passage, work with neighborhood watch groups, etc.

Continue Training Efforts: The Police Department has completed Procedural Justice Training, which focuses on the way police interact with the public. It also has undertaken Implicit Bias Training, which addresses the automatic association people now make between groups of people and stereotypes about those groups. The department should continue such training efforts, including working with specific religious communities, the LGBTQI community, or those with limited English language skills. It's imperative for the department to be able to measure the results of the training as well. We recommend officers take a Procedural Justice refresher course/workshops each year to reinforce the objective that the principles of Procedural Justice should be the core of policing.

Body Cameras: Patrol Officers are required to wear body cameras. We recommend that ALL police officers wear body cameras while working in the field and be phased in as funds become available. To help improve trust and transparency, it is recommended that the footage from the body cameras is not withheld from the community during times the community is requesting transparency and accountability in a particular incident. Policies and procedures should be formulated to help show the community that the City of Poughkeepsie police does not stand for "covering up the truth or improper conduct" but stand for justice, transparency and accountability.

Use of Force: Current policy states periodic training will be received. Recommend yearly use of force training. In policy #301, it states a Use of Force Review Board is convened when the use of force by a member results in very serious injury or death to another person. This board will investigate and review the facts of the circumstances surrounding the incident. We noticed that the members who make up this board is left blank. We recommend that the members who are responsible to serve on this board are listed, and the policies of this board to investigate the use of force are clear and transparent.

Finalizing the police reform plan is still a work in process. The Procedural Justice Committee will receive the City of Poughkeepsie Police's draft reform plan to review and then forward to the City Common Council to review and set a public hearing to get feedback on the draft reform plan. The Common Council will either accept the draft report or send additional recommendations or changes to the report before approving as a final document to be sent to New York State Governor's office. Deadline for submission is April 1, 2021.

Common Council Member Yvonne Flowers and Bishop Debra Gause, co-chairs of the City of Poughkeepsie Procedural Justice Committee.

Special thanks to the following committee members for their participation in gathering information from the community to be considered in the reform plan:

Jason Baker
Michael Barbagallo
Stacey Bottoms
Satara Brown
Linwood Burke
Gregory Charter

Natasha Cherry
Paul Feathersen
Yvonne Flowers
Debra Gause
Chris Libolt
Debra Long
Carmen McGill
Tom O'Neill
John Penney
Marina Tarkos
L'quette Taylor
Erick Vasquez
Matthew Weishaupt
Devon Zanin
Karen Zirbel