



Public Safety

BOL Meeting Minutes - Final

Committee Chair: Colin Smith

800 Michaelian Office Bldg.
148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor
White Plains, NY 10601
www.westchesterlegislators.com

Thursday, March 4, 2021

3:00 PM

Committee Room

CALL TO ORDER

With a quorum present, Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 3:03 PM.

Pursuant to Governor Andrew Cuomo's Executive Order No. 202.1, "Continuing Temporary Suspension and Modification of Laws Relating to the Disaster Emergency," which temporarily suspends portions of the New York State Open Meetings Law.

A section of the order, "Suspension of law allowing the attendance of meetings telephonically or other similar services," provides for the suspension of "Article 7 of the Public Officers Law, to the extent necessary to permit any public body to meet and take such actions authorized by the law without permitting in public in-person access to meetings and authorizing such meetings to be held remotely by conference call or similar service, provided that the public has the ability to view or listen to such proceeding and that such meetings are recorded and later transcribed."

Others in Attendance: BOL: James Silverberg BOL Remote: Alfreda Williams, Catherine Borgia, Damon Maher, Catherine Parker, Ruth Walter, Melanie Montalto DPS: Commissioner Thomas Gleason, Chief Christopher Calabrese Captain James Greer, Sergeant James Dress, Sergeant Michael Hagan, PIO Kieran O'Leary CEO: Blanca Lopez Others: Mayo Bartlett and Leroy Frazer

Present: Legislator Smith

Remote: Legislator Barr, Legislator Boykin, Legislator Covill, Legislator Cunzio, Legislator Johnson, Legislator Shimsky and Legislator Woodson-Samuels

MINUTES APPROVAL

I. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

2021-154

2021 Westchester County Police Reform Report

Forwarding the 2021 Westchester County Police Reform and Reimaging Task Force Report
This County Executive Communication was placed directly into the Committee on Public Safety. It appears here for Tracking Purposes only.

Discussion on Community Engagement

Guests:

Co-Chair Mayo Bartlett

Co-Chair Leroy Frazer

Blanca Lopez, Assistant Director of Operations- CE Office

Copernicus Crane, Assistant to the County Executive- CE Office

Commissioner Thomas Gleason- Department of Public Safety

Chief Christopher Calabrese- Department of Public Safety

Captain James Greer- Department of Public Safety

Sergeant James Dress- Department of Public Safety

Sergeant Mike Hagan- Department of Public Safety

PIO Kieran O'Leary- Department of Public Safety

Chairman Smith of the Public Safety Committee opened the meeting in memory of retired Sergeant Bruce Bellom who passed this week from complications with COVID-19. He was a member of the Westchester County Department of Public Safety for 34 years and retired in 2016.

Chair Smith thanked the members of the Westchester County Police Reform & Reimagining Task Force, the Department of Public Safety, and all the participants for making this process both informative and professional. He stated that the work we have done here will continue to benefit the residents of our County.

Co-chair Mayo Bartlett began the presentation from the Community Engagement Working Group by discussing that the importance of police and community relationships is essential. Local police departments need to build and nurture relationships with the communities they serve. How do police officers know about the community they work in? Do community members feel comfortable interacting with the police? What role do school resource officers, peace officers, and sheriffs play in their interaction with various community stakeholders? The members of the Community Engagement Working Group include:

- Rev. Doris K. Dalton – Chair, Westchester County Human Rights Commission*
- Andre G. Early – Commissioner, Dept. of Community Resources, Town of Greenburgh*
- Chad Golanec – Law Enforcement Professional*
- Hon. Damon R. Maher, Esq. – Westchester County Legislator, District 10*
- Shondra Floyd McClary – Board Member, Westchester Martin Luther King, Jr., Inst. For Nonviolence*

- Karine Patiño, Esq. – Criminal Justice Professional*
- Robyn Schlesinger, Esq., Member, LGBTQ Advisory Board*
- Mayo Bartlett, Esq. – Task Force Co-Chair*
- Leroy Frazer, Esq. – Task Force Co-Chair*
- Blanca P. Lopez, Working Group Liaison*

The task force Co-chairs presented the recommendations which was followed by Commissioner Gleason giving his response to these recommendations on behalf of the Department of Public Safety. These are the recommendations from the Qualification and Recruitment Working Group:

- To prepare law enforcement personnel (civilian and uniformed) for consistent, positive*

community encounters and engagement, we recommend implicit bias training and intercultural competency training for all law enforcement personnel.

- Training facilitation should be a team approach between experts in these topics and law enforcement.*
- Create an environment that reinforces positive community engagement by identifying and valuing skills and competencies within police officers. These characteristics are essential for a successful officer-community engagement program to exist.*
- WCDPS shall provide a clear description of the role that County Police play in the municipalities of Cortlandt and Mount Kisco on the WCDPS website and on the Town of Cortlandt and Village of Mount Kisco websites.*
- There shall be a formal review of WCDPS's use of social media, and an analysis of how this medium could be used for branding and community outreach.*
- Consider the possibility of creating community liaisons to serve as ambassadors to various segments of the population, especially those that have traditionally been considered marginalized.*
- WCDPS's homepage should be made available to people who do not speak English as their preferred language, and shall be clearly available in a menu on the website's Home Page. This recommendation applies to emergency alerts sent out by the Dept. as well.*
- WCDPS shall obtain primary data or feedback from school districts it serves via their School Resource Officer (SRO) Program.*
- SROs shall receive training on implicit bias, restorative justice practices, and mentoring.*
- Consider the creation of "Police Community Support Officers" (PCSOs) or use a similar structure.*
- The group reimagines police officers to pledge to use force as a last resort and explore non-lethal technology.*
- Consider the following suggestions included from the report prepared by the Town of Cortlandt titled, "Public Safety and Policing Improvements."*
- Expand the use of specialized teams to respond to mental health calls countywide and explore additional co-response initiatives*
- Create and implement a Countywide electronic database for Mental Health Behavioral cases and special needs populations.*
- Design and add a series of questions regarding an officer's interaction with the community they serve when considering promotions and/or annual evaluations.*

Chair Smith asked if the Department could explain the difference between police officers and the Sheriffs emergency force? Chief Calabrese responded that the Sheriffs emergency force is an auxiliary force that are unpaid civilians that have been activated by the County at certain times of emergency such as during September 11th, 2001 and during Hurricane Sandy. This group are Peace Officers that have gone through a volunteer peace officer school and can be requested by other jurisdictions when they do not have the manpower to be able to handle the event such as a big even or a parade. Their primary duties when they are requested from other jurisdictions are for crowd control and traffic control. When they are not activated, they have no police powers.

Chair Boykin asked about the mental health recommendation and how that works across multiple departments and local municipalities? Mr. Bartlett responded that in the past the County has partnered with local municipalities and they provided someone from the Department of Community Mental Health who would work with law enforcement officers so

that there would be a team that would respond to a mental health crisis. The task force recommends that resources are provided to expand on this process and train officers at the County and in local municipalities to be able to respond to these calls. Chief Calabrese added that every recruit who goes through the academy now receives crisis intervention training. There is also an expanded 40 hour course that a large percentage of officers and everyone on the hostage negotiation team has gone through. When scheduling patrol shifts, the Department makes sure that there are officers who have done this training who are scheduled on each shift. That way if there is something that requires someone with a higher level of training on crisis intervention, they are available. Chief Calabrese noted that as far as the actual response, they do not necessarily know going into the response that an individual is having a mental health crisis. If there is a prolonged incident, then a mental health employee will be contacted to intervene in the situation. When there are hostage negotiations taking place, there is a mental health professional from Westchester County that goes with the Police on that call. Mr. Bartlett added that the task force recommendation is to make this service available to the local municipalities. Chair Boykin stated that this expansion is going to be critical especially with the mental health issues that have been compounded through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Legislator Maher stated that he believes any organization would want everyone top to bottom to receive implicit bias training. He also mentioned that the working group looked at models where the 911 operators receive training to determine the type of call that they have received and who to dispatch to this call. He also stated that there is a lot of academic information relating to SROs and that some suggest that money is better spent on school counsellors than on SROs. Commissioner Gleason responded that the school districts that the County contracts with for SROs have requested this service and continue to renew these contracts. Sergeant Dress added that this is community driven, there are some things that work for certain communities that do not work for others. He added that here in Westchester County the relationship with the school and their community has been a positive relationship and that other departments and school districts have used the County's program as a model. Legislator Cunzio asked if there were and school superintendents, principles, teachers or staff members who have SROs in their schools? Mr. Frazer responded that there were no principles or teachers that were members of this working group.

Legislator Barr noted that it was brought to her attention that a department in her district does not conduct police officer evaluations and asked why that is? Commissioner Gleason responded that the department in question must not be accredited by the State since one of the requirements for State accreditation is that officer evaluations are conducted.

II. OTHER BUSINESS

III. RECEIVE & FILE

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Legislator Cunzio, seconded by Legislator Barr, the Committee adjourned at 4:57 PM.