

COMMUNITY OVERSIGHT TASK FORCE

PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

November 30, 2017

Present at the meeting were Community Oversight Task Force (COTF) members Ed Jackson (co-chair), Daniel Levine (secretary), Jeff Anderson, Denise Duval, Ralph Hughes, and Andrew Reinel.

Also present were:

Lawrence Grandpre, Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle
Ja Hon Vance, Baltimore City Community College

Summary of motions passed:

- November 16, 2017 minutes adopted without revision

I. Welcome

Ed Jackson called the meeting to order at 6:04PM.

II. Adoption of Minutes

Jeff Anderson moved that the minutes be adopted without revision. He was seconded by Denise Duval; the motion passed unanimously.

III. Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle

Lawrence Grandpre, who attended on behalf of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle (LBS), a seven-year-old Baltimore grassroots think-tank that has been engaged on police issues (for instance, in support of improved mental health training for law enforcement), provided a brief overview of his organization. He explained that the organization began with Black former policy debaters from Towson University who were dissatisfied with the support for Black students in the policy debate community, and grew into a community-based (not not-for-profit) advocacy group. Currently, he explained, reform of the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBR) was a priority for the organization.

At Daniel Levine's request, Mr. Grandpre went into more detail regarding strategy for LEOBR change. There was discussion of the role that conservative Democrats (at both the city and state level), as well Republicans, who both tend to favor a "crime control" approach to law enforcement play in making police reform difficult – both in general, and with respect to particular initiatives, such as making civilian representation on Baltimore City police trial boards, mandatory. Mr. Grandpre opined that the COTF could support reform efforts both by using its prominence to lend weight to recommendations and connecting with groups and organizations outside Baltimore, such as statewide "Black Lives Matter" networks. He, along with Col. Jackson, also emphasized the need to make connections with police themselves around the idea that reform helped police as well as other citizens. While Col. Jackson pointed out that there was a culture of contrasting officers' safety with procedural rules, he also argued that there could be rhetorical leverage around the fact that the current system did not always serve rank-and-file officers well. Andrew Reinel suggested reaching out specifically to organizations that represented police officers from minority groups, such as the Vanguard Justice Society.

Col. Jackson noted that legislators who may be progressive on social issues are often conservative on law enforcement, since they see no way to address the effects of deep social problems like poverty except through strict enforcement. Dr. Levine suggested that giving the civilian oversight body a mandate to examine trends in misconduct allegations and policing in addition to particular cases (as had been suggested in earlier meetings) could provide some ability to address broader social issues. Dr. Anderson said that this might be done by requiring statistical analysis. Mr. Grandpre suggested that the oversight entity could be charged with policy review, and with creating a “racial equity impact statement” for any proposed policy or budget changes.

In response to a question from Ralph Hughes, Mr. Grandpre said that LBS planned to support legislation in the next session for reform, including mandating civilians on police trial boards, but were uncertain of the chances of passage.

IV. November 14 meeting with Department of Justice (DoJ) personnel

On Tuesday, November 14, members of the COTF, along with Ray Kelly of the No Boundaries Coalition, and Dayvon Love and Mr. Grandpre of LBS, met with members of the DoJ. Ms. Duval reported on the meeting. A major point of discussion was the limitations on reform imposed by the fact that the Consent Decree is explicit that it does not supersede state law or collective bargaining agreements. DoJ personnel were not able to advocate around this issue, but agreed to provide technical support to the COTF on how recommendations might interact with existing law and policy.

COTF members also discussed the possibility of recommending an oversight body that would be broader than the existing Civilian Review Board (CRB), including oversight of complaints of police misconduct (including the current functions of the CRB) but also administration and discipline, policy, and training.

COTF members also discussed the need to extend the Task Force’s time to produce its final recommendations.

Finally, the DoJ representatives and the COTF members present discussed options for legal strategies.

V. Monitor forum at Mergenthaler Vocational High School

Ms. Duval reported on her attendance at the first community input forum organized by the Baltimore Community Mediation Center (BCMC) – in its capacity as the community engagement arm of the consent decree monitor – at Mergenthaler Vocational High School (MerVo) on November 21. The forum involved a presentation by the monitor and open discussion, followed by smaller breakout sessions. While Ms. Duval thought that this forum went well overall, she noted that many community members there expressed that they were tired of saying what they thought needed to be done regarding police reform while perceiving minimal concrete change.

VI. CRB “retreat”

Dr. Anderson asked for more details regarding a proposed extended retreat-style meeting between the COTF and members of the CRB. Mr. Reinel also asked if it would involve only CRB staff, or members of the board as well. Ms. Duval replied that Marvin McKenstry was working out details, but that it would include both staff and board members. Dr. Anderson noted that it would be important to make clear that COTF recommendations might involve structural change to the CRB,

not just reform.

VII. Future meetings and conversations

Col. Jackson said that he would reach out to the head of the FOP and invite him to address the COTF, to ensure that police felt they were brought into the conversation and their interests were respected. In addition to their inherent importance as stakeholders, this would likely be an important element of strategy for getting reforms adopted.

Mr. Reinel reported that he was trying to organize a focus group of Latinx residents of Baltimore for December 13.

VIII. Future COTF meeting dates/times

Dr. Anderson requested that changing the day of the week on which the COTF meets be placed on the agenda for December 14, to accommodate his new teaching schedule.

IX. Writer

Col. Jackson invited Ja Hon Vance, a professor at Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) to speak on support that he, via his consulting firm (JV Educational Consultants), could provide to the COTF's selection of a writer. Prof. Vance indicated that the firm could assist the Task Force with vetting candidates for the writer position, and convene a special issue of its open-access journal on the subject of the COTF's final report.

Ms. Duval, on behalf of the COTF, also thanked Prof. Vance for helping to organize the meeting held at BCCC, and Prof. Vance reported that his students were still talking about it. Col. Jackson appreciated that the meeting gave the COTF a chance to show that studying criminal justice could be a path to social change, and Mr. Reinel added that it was a great chance to interact with a larger number of attendees than were usual for the meetings.

X. Events spreadsheet

Mr. Reinel informed the COTF that he had created a spreadsheet where members could list events of potential interest, and also note that they planned to attend. This would allow members to ensure that some members were in attendance at important events, and also avoid potential questions of propriety were a quorum to be present.

XI. Academic connections

Ms. Duval noted that she had spoken at a law school forum alongside City Solicitor Andre Davis, and had requested that students interested in supporting COTF work contact her.

Mr. Reinel noted that he would also be interested in academic collaborations, as his academic work was currently focused on policy proposals for police reform.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:52PM