CFLJ COMMENTARY

Your process will not be successful ... without deep and probing consideration of the perspectives of those who seek reform. " --- Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Workbook (August 2020)

Eyes on the Prize

The City is apparently in a state of denial regarding the APD’s failure to appreciate the impact of disproportionate policing and racial bias on the lives of people of color in Albany. The Albany Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative has been broken into Working Groups to pursue solutions to the problems ---- without ever asking the community exactly what those problems are.

The City seems to have missed the part of the Governor’s Executive Order that requires that the Collaborative develop a plan “for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served by such police agency and promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness, and legitimacy, and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color.”

Leading up to the formation of the Working Groups, approximately 180 minutes of Collaborative meeting time were devoted to having the APD educate community members about policing. The number of minutes allocated to having community members tell the police about their particular needs and the impacts of disproportionate policing and racial bias in their neighborhoods was --- 0. That’s right --- zero. Oh, an intrepid community member may have made a comment or asked a question here and there, but there was no time set aside on the Collaborative’s agenda for the police to listen to the community.

The Collaborative offered no expert presentation on the impact of systemic racism in policing. Apparently, the City believes the police are not in need of enlightenment about racism from the community or anybody else. Yet Police Chief Hawkins has yet to acknowledge that racism has had an impact on policing in Albany, and recent quotes from APD members have demonstrated a dire need for remedial education.

Five Working Groups were established by the City: Policies and Standard Operating Procedures; Civilian Oversight; Police Department Footprint; Crime Reduction and Restorative Justice; and Recruitment, Training, and Officer Development. These five groups will meet separately to discuss their respective topics and produce recommendations for consideration by the Collaborative as a whole. While the groups are meeting, the Collaborative will not.

Each Working Group is to consist of government members, community members, and APD members. At the September 22nd meeting, it was suggested by a community member that having APD personnel in each meeting might not be a good idea due to the power dynamic. The Mayor replied that APD members have to be in each group because they “will have to live with the policy changes.”

* The Mayor added that the Governor’s mandate requires that police personnel be included in the process. In actuality, while it is true that the Governor’s Executive Order requires that the Collaborative “consult with stakeholders, including but not limited to membership and leadership of the local police force,” nowhere does it say that police personnel must be included in every discussion among community Collaborative members.
The Center wishes the City would show the same empathy for Albany’s people of color, who have had to live with oppressive policing for centuries. The very least the City could have done is let people tell their stories in the Collaborative.

The Governor intended the Collaborative to be a place for the community to learn about policing and the police to learn about the communities’ *particular needs*. But, the community members and the APD personnel are entering into the Working Groups together, looking for solutions together, with the community having been schooled about policing but the APD having learned *absolutely nothing* about the impact of disproportionate policing and racial bias on Albany’s people of color.

What’s wrong with this picture? According to the Governor,

*The real issue is the continuing racism in this country and it is chronic and it is endemic and it is institutional and it speaks to a collective hypocrisy. We’re very good in this country at telling other people how they should live their lives and how they should act, but we still discriminate on the basis of color of skin. That is the simple, painful truth - but this is a moment for truth. Our challenge today is to use this moment, use this energy constructively and demand real positive change. And articulate what the change is that we want. George Floyd must not have died in vain. Mr. Floyd’s killing must be a moment in which this nation actually learned and grew and progressed to make this place a better place.*

--- Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, May 31, 2020

Collaborative members need not be cowed by the presence of APD members in every Working Group. It is not the community’s job to make the police feel comfortable because “they are the ones who will have to live with the policy changes.”

The mission is to rid Albany of disproportionate policing and racial bias.

Let’s keep our Eyes on the Prize.

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