

Seattle
Community
Police Commission

Our City. Our Safety. Our Police. Better Together.

September 23, 2015

To the Collaborative for a Safe, Fair, and Just Cleveland, Cleveland NAACP-Legal Redress Committee, National Lawyers Guild, and allied signatories:

We write to respond to and endorse your letters of August 26, 2015 and August 28, 2015 (Open Letters to Frank G. Jackson, Mayor of Cleveland, and Steven Dettelbach, United States Attorney, Northern District of Ohio) regarding the need to amplify the community voice in court-supervised police reform efforts under consent decrees, and the need to ensure federal Monitors in these cases are responsive to local community expertise. We hope that the Seattle Community Police Commission (CPC) joining in agreement with your diverse and respected coalition of grassroots police reformers will help highlight these points for the consideration of other jurisdictions entering into consent decree processes. While we presently enjoy a strong working relationship with other City of Seattle departments and entities involved in the police reform process, we should stress that this letter represents solely the views of the CPC.

As you know, Seattle's CPC was instituted as part of the Settlement Agreement between the City of Seattle and the U.S. Department of Justice to reform Seattle Police Department (SPD) practices related to excessive use of force and biased policing. The Settlement Agreement stated that "ongoing community input into the development of reforms, the establishment of police priorities, and mechanisms to promote community confidence in SPD will strengthen SPD and facilitate police/community relationships necessary to promote public safety."

In order to effect that input, the Settlement Agreement required the CPC's formation and provided for a distinct set of CPC responsibilities, including those detailed in a separate Memorandum of Understanding between the City and the U.S. Department of Justice. In hindsight, it is clear to us that the narrowly defined specific functions called out for the CPC under the MOU have caused confusion and sometimes impeded our work. The MOU does provide that the CPC may make recommendations to the City in other areas, and we have, to sometimes significant effect. However, it would have been far more efficient and effective for a broader policy role to have been spelled out initially for the CPC, and recognized by all parties to the Settlement Agreement.

In Seattle as well as Cleveland, it has become clear that the role of local community experts in police reform in cities under settlement agreements or consent decrees needs further attention. There are real questions as to the extent to which the community's voice is truly part of the reform process. The CPC is

not a formal party to Seattle's Settlement Agreement; serious consideration of its recommendations has evolved over time as trusting and open relationships with City leaders and the U.S. Department of Justice have been forged. As much as we appreciate that organic evolution, it would be far preferable to have a formal expectation that the CPC be consulted or engaged with before key policy recommendations are made by the parties or accepted by the Monitor or the Court. The CPC assuming a more formal role would avoid the CPC having to ask every time a new topic emerges for a seat at the table.

Given the lessons learned here in Seattle during the last two and a half years, we intend to issue soon a report that details the CPC's experience relative to these concerns which may help inform other communities involved in police reform efforts throughout the country.

Now, more than ever, it is important that cities seeking to reform their police practices hear and respond to local community expertise. Otherwise, the risk that well-intended reform measures will be superficial, unsustainable or even counterproductive is significant. In formal reform agreements involving federal Monitors, we agree that—as you so eloquently wrote—it is essential that the communities most impacted are involved in the Monitor selection process, including setting criteria for that selection which emphasize and ensure a meaningful role of the community in reform efforts. It is equally critical that the role of community in settlements or under consent decrees be effectively institutionalized, and that community experts not be left to fight their way into conversations where their knowledge and insights should be expected and invited from the outset. Whether through a Community Police Commission or otherwise, a court-supervised police reform process should make formal provisions that ensure community expertise is weighed before key policy reforms are undertaken, lest those have unintended negative consequences, or be less effective than they could otherwise have been.

We appreciate your leadership in raising these issues in Cleveland, and fully join with you on all the points in both your letters. Please let us know if we can be of any assistance as the reform process moves forward in Cleveland.

Respectfully,



Harriett Walden, Co-Chair
Community Police Commission



Lisa Dugaard, Co-Chair
Community Police Commission