



COLCHESTER POLICE DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: COLCHESTER SELECTBOARD
FROM: DOUGLAS ALLEN, CHIEF OF POLICE
SUBJECT: CPD BIAS AWARENESS
DATE: 06/04/2020

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis this past week struck me with shock, outrage, and sadness. This unnecessary death of a person of color due to the actions and inactions of members of my chosen profession is deeply troubling.

As many police administrators across our state and nation have done and will continue to do, our leadership team is taking this opportunity to review our own policies, procedures, and practices to see where we can better prevent such an occurrence from happening in our own community. Taken a step further, we ask ourselves if we are providing fair and equitable protection and policing services to all citizens including the marginalized.

I started with our selection process. I have been in the forefront of our recruiting efforts here at CPD for several years prior to my promotion to Chief. I am familiar with the pressures to fully staff our allotment of sworn officers while competing with other law enforcement entities as well as the private sector. Attracting qualified candidates for a career in local law enforcement is very difficult and recent events will not improve this situation.

We have resisted pressures to “cut corners” in our hiring process and have maintained a robust selection process including a thorough background investigation. This has paid dividends with our department staffing a strong, dedicated group of law enforcement professionals, many having ties to the Colchester community.

In looking at our current staff of sworn officers and civilian staff, I know that our challenge for the future will be to retain this talented group and prepare them to take on the leadership opportunities that will present themselves in the near future. I believe that we are heading down the right path for our future.

As a small department of 29 sworn officers (large for Vermont), we currently have just under 7% minorities by race or ethnicity and 24% women. The race/ethnicity makeup is equal to that in our community, but given our department size, a single employee change could significantly alter these numbers. We continue to attempt to attract more applications from women and minorities.

The second aspect of ensuring that our department is fulfilling the community's needs is creating and implementing policies and procedures that are up to date and effective. As a member of her leadership team along with now Deputy Chief Jeff Barton, Chief Morrison lead us through a complete re-write of our General Orders to bring them up to standard. We continue to re-write and add policies as needed including a complete revision of our Use of Force Policy, our Evidence and Property Policy, and our Motor Vehicle Crash Investigation policy in the past year.

Our policies are interwoven with directives for proper procedures that would have prohibited the behavior we have seen on the news. Employees are required to intervene if they encounter an officer that is breaking the law and are equally required by conduct standards to report that behavior. That accountability is repeated throughout orders that spell out our policies on such topics as Internal Investigations, Police Operations, and Domestic Violence by Employees to name a few. Policies that require anti biased policing are in place and have been in place prior to the current Vermont statutory requirement. Our Use of Force policy was reviewed and had contributions provided by Sergeant Michael Akerlind, the state's senior Use of Force instructor.

What ties these elements together is training and communication. We provide training to our staff that makes clear the expectations of proper techniques and procedures. De-escalation training has been part of our use of force training for a number of years and is embedded in our policies. The state standard for firearm certification is once annually. For over twenty years, CPD has provided four firearm training sessions per year. Review of policy and recent court decisions help us ensure that our officers are up to date and employing best practices.

We also have a robust reporting and review process for all uses of force. Supervisors and leadership review each use of force to identify needs for training or policy changes.

We have sent officers to training on implicit bias where we learned that everyone carries bias of some sort with them daily. The key is to recognize that bias, learn how to overcome it, and keep it from becoming an explicit bias. We have instructors imbedded in our staff on fair and impartial policing and how to best communicate and protect everyone we encounter including undocumented persons. We are aware that if someone is afraid to contact the police due to their immigration status, their safety may be in peril.

In 2015 following the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri by police, President Obama created the Task Force on 21st Century Policing. The report outlined six “pillars” of recommendations. We utilize these six pillars as a roadmap to our efforts to remain an effective and innovative department. These pillars are:

- Building Trust and Legitimacy in the Community
- Policy and Oversight
- Technology and Social Media
- Community Policing and Crime Prevention
- Training and Education
- Officer Safety and Wellness

We work to create and foster a “culture” that everyone takes pride in being a part of. We talk among ourselves of doing the “right thing” when decisions are made and doing what would be best for the community and department alike. Our supervisory and leadership staff was chosen with as much care as our recruits because we know that they play a vital role in keeping the proper attitude and culture in place. We keep up on the “little” problems so they don’t become ingrained issues.

I believe that we are on the right course to maintain high standards of conduct, professionalism, and effectiveness. We subscribe to the theory that we derive our authority and mission from the community we serve. We will continue to stay vigilant to ensure that we are serving all of the community including those who have been marginalized or have been the victims of systemic discrimination. We will also continue to learn, train, and evolve both proactively and in response to events and actions in our community and elsewhere.