



CITIZEN OVERSIGHT BOARD

Open Letter in Response to the Death of George Floyd and Policing in Denver - June 5, 2020

The Citizen Oversight Board (COB) grieves the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the countless other martyrs whose lives were lost at the intersection of systemic racism and police violence. We mourn Michael Marshall, Marvin Booker, Jessie Hernandez, Paul Castaway, and Ryan Ronquillo, as well as others who have died in their interactions with the Denver Police and Sheriff Departments.

Since its creation in 2004, the COB has worked, often behind the scenes, to bring incremental improvements to the policies that govern law enforcement. We have not done enough. No one has.

Often thwarted by structural barriers that give civilians little more than advisory authority, or blocked at times by political interests antithetical to transparency, we have reviewed investigations from which insufficient discipline or reform ever resulted. There are inherent limits to a system in which law enforcement investigates and disciplines itself. Those limitations cannot be mitigated by constricted oversight measures.

We are frustrated but committed and in need of support. We need to fill our meetings, month after month, year after year, to demonstrate sustained public interest in civilian oversight of law enforcement and criminal justice reform. We need more individuals and community organizers to share their experiences and ideas. We need more legislators to defy the will of established interests. We need more voters to cast their ballots with the conviction that guns and tear gas are purchased by taxpayer money and that citizens have a role to play in governing their use.

We are compelled to offer suggestions for reform that we can make as a community, in collaboration with Denver law enforcement. What follows is a partial list. Far more significant structural changes are likely necessary. We hope you will stand with us, work with us, and help guide us in the months and years to come.

In Service,

The Denver Citizen Oversight Board

- Empower and strengthen the authority of civilian oversight agencies, like the Citizen Oversight Board and the Office of the Independent Monitor
- Fund those agencies accordingly, pegging their budgets to police expenditures
- Institute more extensive, ongoing training programs on racial bias for all law enforcement officers, and make that curriculum a requirement to recertification
- Insist that any sustained allegation of misconduct that includes racial discrimination be made an immediately terminable offense
- Require the Denver Police and Sheriff Departments to conduct rigorous, ongoing First Amendment training for all officers
- Establish strong peer intervention programs teaching active bystandership, training officers how to intercede regardless of rank, and establishing protections for those who do

- Expand mental health support services for officers
- Convene a broad community-based forum for updating the Denver Police and Sheriff Departments handbooks, including their disciplinary matrixes, and facilitate regular public inclusion in the process
- Continue and expand co-responder programs, adding more civilian roles to patrols
- Review participation in programs that fund the purchase or transfer of excess military equipment from the federal government to local law enforcement
- Overhaul the Civil Service Commission and Career Service Board, particularly the rules regarding the repeal disciplinary decisions
- Insist on citizen participation in the disciplinary process
- Ensure that when an officer moves from one jurisdiction to another, their unredacted employment history, including dismissed allegations, is shared as a precondition of employment
- Repeal laws that conceal police disciplinary records relating to use of force, criminal activity and discrimination from public view
- Reconsider the budget allocation between the Denver Police and Sheriff Departments and programs that address mental health issues and homelessness

COB Mission Statement: To foster change towards cooperative, just and accountable relationships between Denver's community and law enforcement.