

Introduction

The Seattle Community Police Commission (CPC) was established in October 2012. The CPC's 15 commissioners were confirmed by the City Council in March 2013 and have met as a full commission bi-weekly since that time. The CPC consists of 15 volunteers representing the diversity of Seattle and includes civil rights and civil liberties advocates, business and faith leaders, mental health and housing providers, and representatives from the two SPD unions. All have experience directly relevant to police reform.

The CPC is unique—no other city in the country operating under a Consent Decree with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to reform its police department has established a commission expressly responsible for representing community interests and perspectives in developing reform recommendations for changes in police policy, practices, training and community outreach. The CPC was intended, in the words of the Court Monitor, to be “a powerful, independent policymaking body that proceeds carefully based upon evidence and whose conclusions have great integrity and persuasive power.”

Key Accomplishments in 2013

Policy Recommendations

In November, the CPC issued policy recommendations related to bias-free policing, stops and detentions, use of force, and in-car video recordings. The recommendations were developed by CPC workgroups in close collaboration with multiple stakeholders including SPD, the DOJ, the federal Monitor, the City Attorney's Office, other City offices, and were informed by the views of the community. The different perspectives it considered ensured that the CPC policy recommendations supported both Constitutional policing and safe communities.

Many CPC recommendations were incorporated into SPD policies subsequently approved by the court. The CPC initiated critical elements of SPD's new bias-free policing policy, specifically the groundbreaking requirement that data be collected and analyzed for disparate impact. The CPC also was instrumental in crafting a new policy that more clearly defines the rights and obligations of both police and those stopped and detained. In these instances and also in developing policy recommendations on in-car video recordings, the CPC facilitated discussions among multiple interested parties that thoughtfully addressed a myriad of concerns and ultimately resulted in consensus. The CPC had a limited period in which to comment on a proposed use of force policy, but did provide detailed suggestions, some of which were adopted, to make the policy more concise and clear for both practitioners in the department and for the public.

Community Outreach

Prior to adopting its policy recommendations, the CPC conducted extensive community outreach to obtain insights on both these policy issues and general attitudes about the Seattle Police Department.

The goal was to engage the community in a conversation about fair and effective policing, particularly communities who traditionally have not been heard and who may have substantial concerns with police practices, including communities of color, people who are homeless, immigrants and refugees, youth, people who are mentally ill, persons with substance abuse problems and members of the LGBT community. The CPC also sought the perspectives of the general public throughout Seattle, and of police department officers.

The CPC—with the help of more than 100 community partners—received input from over 3,400 people. More than 150 outreach events were held and more than 3,000 survey questionnaires were completed.

The CPC was successful in its goal of reaching many underrepresented people during this outreach. Seventy-two percent (72%) of the surveys were completed by individuals who identified as people of color. Over 24% identified as immigrant or refugee. Thirty percent (30%) were 25 years old or younger. About 16% identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual, and 1% identified as transgender. The surveys were available in nine languages other than English, were orally translated into 14 more, and 464 were completed in languages other than English.

A detailed report on the community engagement process, including its survey results was issued in January 2014.

CPC Work in 2014

The CPC will continue to seek community perspectives on topics it is responsible for during 2014, and it will encourage and sponsor dialogue in the community on ways to improve community-police relations.

➤ Recommendations on SPD Accountability

The Commission is charged with reviewing SPD's accountability system and will make recommendations for policy, process and structural improvements by the end of April. Along with the commissioners' experience and the insights gained from our extensive community outreach, this work by the CPC is benefiting from a range of perspectives and technical expertise provided by the OPA Auditor and Director, the OPA Review Board, representatives of both police officer unions, SPD, the City Attorney's Office, the DOJ, and the federal Monitor. "The Commission will review Seattle's current three-prong civilian oversight structure to determine if there are changes it would recommend for improving SPD accountability and transparency...the Commission may consider alternative civilian oversight models..." (MOU III.C.(2)i.15.).

➤ Preventing Unnecessary Disparities in Law Enforcement

With the support of a contracted researcher, the CPC will collaborate with SPD in analyzing data on stopped, cited and arrested individuals to determine if SPD's practices have disparate impact on racial/ethnic groups and to understand the extent to which such outcomes are unnecessary. The CPC will then develop recommendations for alternative approaches that support public safety while reducing unnecessary disparities in law enforcement.

➤ Recommendations on SPD Training

The Commission will make recommendations on training curricula and topics related to training in a number of areas including bias-free policing, stops and detentions, use of force and crisis intervention. The deadlines for CPC recommendations vary, with some to be delivered during the first and others during the second quarter of the year.

➤ Recommendations on SPD Community Outreach

The CPC will comment on SPD's community outreach initiatives, offering an initial assessment in mid-March and a comprehensive assessment at the end of July.

For More Information

CPC reports and detailed background information on the Commission, its members and charge are available online at <https://www.seattle.gov/policeCommission/>.