

Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Feedback 1/1 – 1/15/2021

*** If you supply your name and/or hamlet, it will be shared with the Advisory Committee as well as online. ***

Received Saturday, January 2 via web form

Name (optional) Charles Marshall

Hamlet (optional) Delmar

Feedback Just wishing everyone there a Happy New Year.

I am concerned about reports of police being demoralized in the current political climate.

I want to say that the Bethlehem police have always been helpful and diplomatic with me, even when I was stopped for a traffic infraction.

If there is any citizen activity that helps the whole community mood and morale, I would like to participate.

Received Wednesday, January 13 via email

Name Laura DiBetta

Hamlet Delmar

Supervisor VanLuven, members of the Police Reform and Reinvention Collaboration Advisory Committee, thank you all for doing this critically important work, especially those of you who are volunteering your time to be part of a movement for positive change in our community. This process involves hard discussions on issues that people feel passionately about and I appreciate how challenging it can be.

Since moving to Bethlehem five years ago, I have been active in the community, including serving on the Town's Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee. In that role, I have had many positive interactions with several members of the BPD, including Commander Hornick, Sergeant Whiteley, and Chief Cocchiara. It's been a very positive collaboration on that committee as we work together to make Bethlehem safer for children and adults biking and walking in our Town.

I write now not as a member of that committee, but as a person who also understands that my interactions are those of a white woman and may not reflect those of people of color. There is a well-documented history of racist policies at all levels of U.S. government and the criminal justice system. No community is immune, including Bethlehem.

I'm speaking now because I'm not an expert on police reform and I've been watching the meetings and reading the information online and I wanted to be thoughtful in my comments. A few things at this point stand out to me.

One thing that has concerned me in these discussions is the seeming denial of bias within the Bethlehem Police Department. When I hear anyone deny bias, alarm bells start sounding. We are all biased, every one of us, but it is something that can be corrected once we become aware of it and acknowledge it. When people of color are ticketed at a rate of 26% yet represent less than 10% of the Town's population, and in particular Black motorists are ticketed at a rate eight times higher than their population here, clearly something is going on. History tells us this is not an accident. Is it bias? Is it racial profiling? I think the Town and the BPD need to take a harder look at this fact alone and provide the community with answers and a plan for how it will address this clear disproportionate policing of people of color.

Moving forward, I also hope to see concrete policy changes come out of this process that address racist policies, provide for equitable treatment for all residents and visitors, and make our community safer and more inclusive for all. In general, I support the 11 demands put forward by the national police reform movement and groups like Bethlehem for Social Justice* and a shift from the warrior to guardian model of policing. In particular, based on the discussions of this committee to date and what I've heard from the community, I strongly support the following specific policies and next steps:

Lastly, I would urge the Town to allow for at least some of these committee meetings to be held without the presence of representatives of the BPD. In thinking about the history of the relationship between police and people of color, I am concerned that the discussions to date have not been as open as they could be and need to be in order for this to be a truly meaningful and inclusive process.

Thank you all again for the time you are putting into this difficult process. I look forward to seeing the work progress.

Sincerely,

Laura DiBetta

Delmar

*1) Automatic firing for all racist text, emails, letters, social media posts, phone calls, and so-called private conversations by police officers.

2) Abolition of all for-profit police programs.

3) Arrest and jail time for all "living while black hate crimes" for private citizens who commit these crimes and the police who attempt to enforce them.

4) Body cameras for the BPD and automatic firing for all disengaged or damaged body cams.

5) Abolition of no-knock warrants.

6) Abolition of all stop and frisk rules in all its forms.

7) Automatic firing, arrest, and jail time for all false reports, fake evidence, and false testimony.

8) End of all ticket writing incentive programs, speed trap schemes, and traffic stops for petty violations.

9) End all non recorded sobriety tests.

10) Abolition of all modern-day forms of the fugitive slave act including bounty hunters, citizen arrest, armed private police, etc.

11) Additionally, the Bethlehem PD should refuse to participate in riot control or curfew enforcement with the Albany Police Department.

Received Thursday, January 14 via email

Name **Paula Read**

Hamlet **Delmar**

I have watched live or recorded sessions from the beginning and have been very impressed by the work being done by the group. They have taken their charge seriously and respectfully. The committee seems welcoming of all points of view, even those on topics that at first seem tangential. Opinions offered are generally supported by clearly articulated facts or research or life experiences. Most impressive of all is the transparency – I'm aware that in many communities the meetings have not been open to the public throughout the entire process.

My concern was, and to some extent still is, that not enough Bethlehem residents are following this very important work. After the topic of increased publicity was discussed at one meeting, I did see more publicity, and I am hoping that others noticed. My fear is that, as often happens, a committee will work hard on a project, only to be challenged at the end by those who were not aware, or worse, have not taken the time to educate themselves. After viewing the meetings and witnessing the commitment and professionalism of the committee members, I am confident that the final product will lead our community forward.