



BEL AIR POLICE DEPARTMENT

39 North Hickory Avenue, Bel Air, Maryland 21014

410-638-4500 · 410-803-9892 (Fax)

Chief of Police
Charles A. Moore

June 10, 2020

NAACP – Harford County
Harford County Caucus of African American Leaders
BRIDGE Maryland
Together We Will Harford County/Upper Chesapeake

The Coalition of Justice for Equality in Harford County,

We have received your correspondence and list for “10 Actions for a Better Harford County.” Just as you indicated in your correspondence, we are absolutely disturbed and appalled by the actions of Officer Derek Chauvin and the other Minneapolis police officers that contributed to the tragic death of Mr. George Floyd. I must also add that government officials from the Town of Bel Air are sickened by the arrest video that documents the callous actions and disregard for human life demonstrated by the police in that incident. It is equally heartbreaking that this disturbing event has the potential to damage and sabotage enormous efforts by the majority of police agencies (and officers) from across this nation, like the Bel Air Police Department, who have worked incredibly hard to build trust and partnerships with communities and citizens. We do relate with concerns echoed across the country in these times for the level of distrust in policing in our country.

Our officers know that our community is stronger when there is collaboration and trust, which is why they work their hardest not only to keep us safe, but to treat all individuals with respect, dignity and equality, regardless of race, color, gender, ethnic background, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, homelessness, economic status, age, cultural group, etc. Rest assured that our police officers embrace the concept of community policing and recognize just as the father of community policing, Sir Robert Peel, remarked in his “Principles of Policing” that:

“Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.”

As a result of taking progressive steps towards the advancement, and in support of, a robust community oriented policing philosophy and practice, many (or most), of the recommendations that you request have already been accomplished by the Bel Air Police Department. The responses to the “list of demands” are below:

Response to "10 Actions for a Better Harford County"

1. By July 15th, 2020, develop a community survey with community input on the parameters of the survey, to assess the level of trust between the community and the LEA (Law Enforcement Agency). This will give LEA a data point from which to work.
 - *The Bel Air Police Department has already completed online community policing surveys – created and overseen by our Citizens Advisory Board (CAB). The surveys were overwhelmingly favorable for the level of trust and appreciation of and for the Bel Air Police Department.*
2. By August 15th, 2020, create or publish procedures that provide transparency for the community regarding misconduct investigations.
 - *The Bel Air Police Department is required to follow protocol concerning the release of details related to misconduct investigations. Transparency concerning misconduct investigations that occur at the Bel Air Police Department are procedurally and legally protected unless officers are convicted/accused of criminal offenses and/or have sustained misconduct cases dealing with matters involving an officer's credibility. Our disciplinary policy relating to police misconduct is published on-line.*
3. Immediately mandate independent investigation and prosecution of officer-involved shootings and in-custody deaths. We recommend in these cases Special Prosecutors be appointed at the State or Federal level.
 - *For transparency's sake, this recommendation could/may be employed by the Bel Air Police Department if an officer-involved shooting or in-custody death were to occur.*
4. Within 4-6 months, reevaluate training, hiring, and LEA employment evaluation standards and practices to ensure procedural justice, remove implicit bias, enhance cultural proficiency, and teach how to de-escalate situations without the use of deadly force. These new standards and practices should be published in all local newspapers and e-papers on the Harford County website, individual jurisdictions' websites, and on all relevant social media platforms.
 - *The Bel Air Police Department is very committed to properly investigating and assessing new employees to ensure that the level of individual explicit and implicit biases is a consideration during the hiring process. Additionally, the Bel Air Police Department is committed, based on our desire to build, promote, and sustain our excellent relationship with citizens and the community, to ensure procedural justice, helping officers to recognize the existence of, and how to mitigate and eliminate, implicit bias. Annual training focuses on enhancing cultural proficiency, and in de-escalation training to try and prevent the use of ANY force during arrests. The Bel Air Police Department has concentrated heavily on getting officers trained in all the aforementioned best practice topics to promote and build positive community relationships and to strengthen trust. A variety of these training topics is*

Response to "10 Actions for a Better Harford County"

addressed annually during in-service training. In August of 2019, as a demonstration of our commitment to recognizing and addressing the important topic of implicit bias, the Bel Air Police Department applied for and was awarded a \$2,500 grant to sponsor implicit bias training for our department. We extended the offer to participate in this important training to other law enforcement and non-law enforcement entities throughout the State of Maryland. This excellent training was conducted by Dr. Kris Marsh from the University of Maryland, who is recognized as an "implicit bias" training expert. There were 30+ attendees which included many of our officers, other law enforcement officers from around the State, employees of the Harford County State's Attorney's Office, and Maryland Office of Parole and Probation. This culturally based training effort, and others, has been advertised and promoted in social media platforms and traditional media platforms.

5. Within 4-6 months, abolish the "double standards" that shield police accused of misconduct by revising the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights to eliminate the 5-day waiting period before an officer is interviewed.
 - *The Bel Air Police Department ensures that "double standard" treatment to shield police accused of misconduct is non-existent. This is accomplished by a rigid but fair disciplinary process that ensures that deficient/unsatisfactory behavior, such as double standards for police misconduct cases, is addressed through progressive disciplinary actions. These actions are reliant upon a matrix of punishments for specific instances of officer misconduct. A disciplinary matrix ensures that punishment is delivered in a consistent and unbiased fashion. Our disciplinary policies are published on-line on the Bel Air Police Department Webpage to promote transparency and confidence in our police services. Revising/amending the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights would have to be a task assigned to local legislators and the Maryland legislature.*
6. Immediately implement effective data collection on all use-of-force incidents. There is a proposed bill in the Maryland legislature called the "Law Enforcement Trust and Transparency Act"; use this bill as a blueprint for implementation of effective data collection.
 - *The Bel Air Police Department ensures that use-of-force incidents are properly documented and reported and that an administrative review is promptly performed.*
 - *It is quite possible that many, or all, of the requirements of the proposed bill "Law Enforcement Trust and Transparency Act" could be followed should a use-of-force incident rise to the level of a police officer-involved death. This response is based on what I understand are the elements that may be required if this proposed Act were to become law.*
7. By January 2022 (the next election cycle year), establish an independent Civilian Review Board to address and respond to any complaints of bias, discrimination, or misconduct by police and sheriffs.

Response to "10 Actions for a Better Harford County"

- *The Bel Air Police Department already recognizes the importance of community partnerships and community input related to citizen and quality of life concerns and complaints of bias, discrimination and/or police misconduct. The Bel Air Police Department was one of the first departments in the State to create a Citizen Advisory Board (CAB) in January of 2017. This board consists of three community members and two business owners and is used to help address serious issues, and provide input on issues, such as complaints of bias, discrimination and/or misconduct by our police officers, and methods of remedy for all quality of life concerns in the Town of Bel Air. One recent accomplishment by our CAB was the creation, dissemination and oversight of a community survey to assess our performance and level of trust in our police department by our community. The Bel Air Police Department appreciates the unbiased perspective of policing provided by our CAB, and we ensure that this board operates in autonomous fashion from the police department in order to promote objectivity and fairness in their decision-making process.*
8. By January 2022 (the next election cycle year), add funding for the implementation of body and vehicle cameras to the budgets of Harford County and all local municipalities to the extent not presently in place. Also, develop privacy, storage, and review and release policies around the use of these cameras in anticipation of their implementation.
- *The Bel Air Police Department is one of the first police agencies in Harford County, Maryland to purchase and deploy body worn cameras. We have a body worn camera policy that follows best practices developed, adopted and recommended by the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission and other law enforcement entities that perform studies on topics like body worn cameras, and make recommendations for best practices and guidance. We do not have an in-car camera system as body cameras are effective in environments inside and outside the patrol vehicle.*
9. By 2023 (within three years), increase the diversity hiring of women and underrepresented minorities so that the personnel makeup of Law Enforcement Agencies is representative of the demographics of Harford County.
- *Diversity is a concern in the Bel Air Police Department and currently we have a good representation of Hispanic/Latino officers and female officers. We are always seeking qualified minorities in order to fairly represent the community we serve and encourage agencies, such as the NAACP, to assist us in finding qualified applicants.*
10. Immediately abolish the use of chokeholds and strangle holds for all members of the Law Enforcement Agency.
- *The Bel Air Police Department does not employ chokeholds or strangle holds in our use of force policy, training or practice.*

Response to "10 Actions for a Better Harford County"

In closing, thank you for reaching out to the Bel Air Police Department and expressing your concerns, which we share. It is hoped that this response will help to relieve some of the anguish and disgust experienced by citizens in relation to acts of police misconduct and abuses that have occurred in Minneapolis and elsewhere. The men and women of the Bel Air Police Department are truly committed to making our community a great place to live, work and visit. I'm open for a meeting with you to discuss this matter.

Sincerely,



Charles A. Moore

Chief

Bel Air Police Department

cmoore@belairmd.org

410-638-4518