



**Allocation of Resources for Law Enforcement and Alternatives
A Position Paper of the RocACTS Criminal Justice Task Force
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Recent events leading to calls for what is often called “defunding” or “abolishing” police, terms which may be vague and misleading, have led us to investigate what these proposals might mean for Rochester. The Criminal Justice Task Force (CJTF) has explored various proposals and approaches to address systemic problems, interviewed community leaders and assessed the implications of changes to police funding on Rochester residents and neighborhoods, as well as the larger Monroe County area. This paper offers recommendations for the position of the CJTF on the issue of re-allocation of police resources.

Faith in Action, the national affiliation of RocACTS, provides a template for considering this issue, called “Bring the H.E.A.T.” This work centers on the issue that policing in America is biased against black people and people of color such that these groups are perceived as threats, subject to excessive force and expresses anti-black hatred and racism reflective of unaddressed historical foundations. The acronym stands for focuses on hiring, equipment, accountability and training. The framework calls for a challenge to city councils, mayors and police chiefs to sign a pledge to #FireAllRacistCops, officers who have affiliations with racist or hate groups. Our recommendations are provided using this framework.

CJTF Recommendations

1. Hiring: We recommend that the Rochester Police Department (RPD) adhere to the following hiring practices:
 - Ensure that police services focus on community safety, responsiveness, service and protection such that harassment, racial profiling and use of excessive force is minimized and eliminated.
 - Officers who have resigned or been terminated for misconduct in any police agency should not be hired at RPD.
 - Emphasize hiring BBPOC (black, brown, people of color) and female personnel so that RPD becomes more closely aligned with the community composition.
 - Emphasize hiring officers who live in or near the communities they serve.
 - Implement the United Christian Leadership Ministry’s (UCLM) suggested Citizen Public Safety Interview Panel to interview police applicants before they are hired to provide input on whether the candidate is prepared to work effectively with communities of color.
 - Create response units that provide trained mental health intervention workers who can respond to routine mental health calls, homelessness, truancy and assist officers in responding to other situations that have potential to escalate without such supportive crisis services.



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- Ensure that candidates for the police force receive psychological screening with appropriate and accurate instruments designed to help assure that the candidate demonstrates the capacity to perform his/her/their duties and meet all other conditions of employment.

2. Equipment:

- Review and assess all military-style equipment that has been accumulated through the federal government distribution of surplus goods to determine whether this equipment enhances a militarized approach to community policing that results in a higher likelihood of use of force, militaristic displays, “warrior” culture and related effects that endanger citizens and communities.
- Divest from utilizing military-style equipment and refrain from acquiring additional material of this nature.
- Review the policies and procedures governing the use of SWAT teams and other potentially higher intensity intervention approaches to assure that their deployment and utilization is clearly defined and in line with community safety needs.
- Require consistent use of body cameras and make the records readily available to the Police Accountability Board and other citizens.
- Avoid the use of facial recognition technology which appears to inappropriately and mistakenly target black people.

3. Accountability:

- Support and cooperate with the Police Accountability Board, accepting civilian disciplinary powers as part of the process.
- Closely monitor and publicly report demographic information about police contacts and the nature of the charges generated.
- Establish clear standards for use of force and ensure that all officers are regularly trained and reviewed on these standards.
- Eliminate policies, procedures, laws and regulations that provide police with qualified immunity.
- Uphold the provisions in the Civil Rights Act of 1871 that established a citizen’s right to sue police officials for damages resulting from misconduct, which have been abrogated by qualified immunity and court precedent rulings.
- Undertake an objective study of what the citizens in communities most affected by policing want from their police, make the findings public and include these findings in actionable accountability measures.

4. Training:

- Establish restorative programs such as the Juvenile Accountability Conferencing program that provided a police employee (not an officer) trained in restorative community conferencing available to assist with conflict resolution in Rochester City School District (RCSD) and other community settings.

- Ensure that training programs in de-escalation, racial justice and anti-bias have been evaluated for effectiveness, required to be completed annually and delivered by qualified trainers.
- Consider requiring police candidates to have completed post high school degrees.

5. Additional:

- Consider structural changes, such as developing a dedicated focus on solving crimes involving gun violence and repeat offenders.
- Consider involving the larger community surrounding Rochester, including other local police agencies and the County Sheriff department in addressing problems that may disproportionately affect the city but have developed as a result of area-wide decisions, policies and practices.
- Establish an ongoing academic research relationship to ensure that changes in policies, procedures and practices are evaluated for effectiveness and possible unintended consequences, particularly on the communities most impacted by crime and policing.
- Ensure that reallocation of funds is thoroughly considered and that the process is transparent and accountable to the public.

Community Background

At this writing, the Rochester City Council has approved ending the contract with the Rochester Police Department for School Resource Officers and voted to cut the \$99.5 million police budget by 3.7%, down to \$95.8 million, reportedly with 728 members. Local Black Lives Matter leaders have demanded a 50% reduction, recommending that funds be reallocated to “investing in schools, investing in arts, investing in health care, investing in mental health,” according to Stanley Martin, speaking at a press conference in June, 2020 (source: WHEC).

According to Chief La’Ron Singletary a 50% reduction to the police budget would reduce staff by 50%. Chief Singletary stated that 90% of the budget is spent on salary, benefits, and pensions. He believes the reduction could drastically affect black and brown communities.

Rev. Lewis W. Stewart, President, United Christian Leadership Ministry, which has been the foremost organization in Rochester-Monroe County relative to police reform, offered that his group is not in favor of using the term “defunding,” due to concern that “it is vague, nebulous and means different things to many people. The better term we use is “re-allocation of resources.”” Further, “What is needed is a better trained and non-racist police force.” UCLM suggests the following points:

1. Re-envisioning the police as Guardians and not Warriors and reinvesting that money into comprehensive training.
2. Racial Justice and Education Training (Mandatory and Annually); A Curriculum offered at the Police Academy and state wide to dismantle the racist culture of policing.
3. Annual Psychological Evaluations for all police officers. This would flag cops suffering from stress disorder and get them needed therapeutic help. If there is no intervention cops will continue to react

by use of excessive force in communities of color. [Note: tools and instruments used in this effort need to be vetted for appropriateness of application]

4. Citizens Public Safety Interview Panel to interview police applicants before they are hired. Three to five community residents will be selected to vet candidates based upon a structured set of questions to ascertain whether they would be a good fit to work in communities of color. The panel would then recommend or choose not to do so.
5. End purchasing of military surplus equipment by the police.
6. Comprehensive De-escalation Training for all officers. Currently when police intervene in a situation they tend to escalate the tension resulting in use of force and arrest.
7. Hiring Mental Health Practitioners to intervene in non-violent and critical situations/incidents.

Rev. Stewart points out that what is lacking has been the will to enact reforms, although recently we have seen Governor Cuomo and the NYS Legislature accomplish the repeal of 50a, which has shielded police disciplinary records. Rev. Stewart also pointed us to President Obama's Taskforce on 21st Century Policing recommendations for further reference. We plan to post a video of our interview with Rev. Stewart soon.

A community forum was held at First Church of God on July 10, which some of our group were able to attend, along with community leaders including Rev. Stewart, Councilman Lightfoot, Rochester Police Chief La'Ron Singletary, Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists and other City Council members (https://www.wxnews.org/post/defunding-rochester-police-discussed-community-forum?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=daily). Councilman Lightfoot stated that he did not support reallocation of funds to the Rochester City School District. It is unclear at this writing where reallocation of funds will be directed.

In a telephone interview, City Councilman Willie Lightfoot notes that research he has reviewed indicates that cities that significantly reduce police funding experience an increase in crime and violence. He supports investigating reallocation of resources, police reform, and addressing systemic racism across all the many areas of society and public life in which it is embedded through policies and procedures. Lightfoot states that this is a vast project that starts with acknowledgement of the problems and which will take an extended and consistent effort over a long period to begin to yield results. Rochester is one of seven cities chosen by the National League of Cities to create the program Let's Get Real (<https://www.cityofrochester.gov/REAL/>). He advocates that community groups such as RocACTS/CJTF collaborate to have conversations that are solution focused and participatory. (source: phone call with Kathleen)

Black Lives Matter advocates Stanley Martin and Ashley Gantt support cutting the RPD by 50% and investing in actions that "build up and empower our people rather than arrest and imprison them," such as schools, arts, health care and mental health services. (source: WHEC, June 16)

The Democrat and Chronicle published an article on defunding here: <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2020/06/15/defund-the-police-meaning-explained-rochester-new-york/5343863002/>

The Center for Public Safety Initiatives at RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology) has a working paper on the issue of defunding or police disbandment as part of a series on police reform, attached in the email format. We interviewed Professor Irshad Altheimer, Director, who suggests that it is important to determine what citizens, particularly in highly affected neighborhoods in the city, want from the police in their communities. Data on the nature of the calls that police are answering would also be helpful in determining guidelines for allocation of resources. For example, directing additional officers to respond to higher level concern calls might be more effective, even if it trades off with slightly longer response times for less urgent calls. His data indicates that most police calls are for minor issues that could be answered by other agencies, and that typically charges brought are misdemeanors. It should also be noted that larger regional influences have shaped the current situation with policing and the issues do not rest solely with the city department, which suggests that county representatives also need to be involved in addressing potential reforms. Prof. Altheimer notes that his current projects include a focus on decreasing gun violence and work in the Buffalo area. Other areas of concern include the use of curfews, stop and frisk policies, the lack of follow up care for trauma involving persons who have been shot, and reviewing data on shootings in Rochester. For more information about Prof. Altheimer, <https://www.rit.edu/directory/ixagcj-irshad-altheimer>. We plan to post a video of our interview with him soon.

Additional Concerns

Faith in Action expresses concerns regarding police unions' contracts that shield officer misconduct, recommending review of the contracts, removal of shielding provisions and revision of use of force policies. At the state level, 50-a, a shielding provision in New York State has recently been revoked. Another significant concern is the reported effort of a variety of hate groups to install members sympathetic to their views on police forces. The demand is for police departments to audit their employees and facilities for evidence of such affiliations, leading to removal of those who demonstrate their biases. Police contracts with schools, colleges and universities and transit systems are also scrutinized. In Rochester, the City Council has terminated School Resource Officer contracts, and the University of Rochester rejected a proposal to bring RPD on campus. Investments in anti-violence programs, drug treatment, employment opportunities, health care and housing are recommended avenues of reallocation of funds. Funding for policing and jails using fees and fines is also identified as an issue to examine at the community level. A radical restructuring of police departments can be accomplished, as was done in Camden, NJ in 2013 due to excessive force issues, resulting in a smaller community policing orientation. Pastor Ben McBride offers a weekly discussion via the LIVE FREE Facebook page, Thursdays at 7 pm, EST.

Conclusion

The Criminal Justice Task Force is committed to engaging with and joining community groups to provide input to planning and assist with implementation of changes to community police policy. We welcome participation from those who are interested in working on this and other concerns in justice and prison reform. We continue to focus on the Police Accountability Board, ending prolonged solitary confinement in New York State by passing the H.A.L.T. (Humane Alternatives to Long Term Solitary Confinement) legislation and citizen advocacy work, among other interests. Please visit the RocACTS website at www.rochesteracts.org for more information.