

Connecticut General Assembly

Police Transparency & Accountability Task Force

Daryl McGraw, Co-Chairperson



c/o Judiciary Committee, Room 2500

Legislative Office Building

300 Capitol Avenue

Hartford, Ct 06106

AMENDED MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 8, 2020 at 1:00 pm

Via Zoom

Members Present: Co-Chairperson: Daryl McGraw, Shafiq Abdussabur, Marc Pelka, Chief State's Attorney Richard Colangelo, Rev. Steven Cousin, Rep. Joshua Hall, Chief Thomas Kulhawik, Chief Keith Mello, Commissioner James C. Rovella, Deputy Chief Maggie Silver for Hans Rhynhart, Jonathan Slifka, Sgt. John Szewczyk, Chief William Wright

Meeting Called to Order by Chairman McGraw at 1:00pm.

Chairman McGraw asks if members received minutes from Task Force Meeting on March 11th and asks for a motion to approve minutes. Motion by Chief Wright seconded by Chief Kulhawik. Minutes approved.

Chairman McGraw welcomes members and Governor Lamont.

Governor Lamont thanks the Chairman, Task Force Members and the Judiciary Committee Chairmen. He acknowledges the importance of the task force and states that while COVID-19 was a distraction, it cannot be a distraction to this task force any longer.

Governor Lamont states that Connecticut needs to do better and come back with a report from this task Force in addition to hearing from agencies who have taken into considerations the task force's recommendations. Governor Lamont ended with response from the Connecticut State Police on the death of George Floyd.

Chairman McGraw thanked the Governor for being on board with the charge of the task force and for contributing to the discussion.

Introduction of new members: Jonathan Slifka appointed by the Speaker of the House, Stephen Cousin appointed by the House Republican Leader and Deputy Chief Maggie Silver, representing Chief Rhynhart. Chairman McGraw states that COVID-19 disrupted the task force and during this time, George Floyd was

killed. The Chairman mentions the 6 pillars from President Obama's *"President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing"*. Discussions need to be had regarding the pillars.

Presentation was given by Andrew Clark, Director of the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy at Central Connecticut State University and Representative Verrengia, House Chairperson of the Public Safety & Security Committee. Director Clark and Representative Verrengia discussed the Public Safety's *"Task Force to Study the Training & Education of Police Officers in the State of CT"*.

Representative Verrengia spoke on measures Connecticut has taken to make sure incidents that have happened nationally do not happen in Connecticut. The task force looked at how police officers are trained. Effective training contributes to diffusing acceleration of potential situations. There was initial pushback from some members but the recommendations were unanimously supported after people came together to collaborate on changes. The Representative highlights changes made to use of force, body cameras, complaint policies, limited use of tasers and reporting policies. Such standardized policies were nonexistent in Connecticut.

Andrew Clark continued presenting on curriculum and education of Police Training (Special Act 16-13). Six presentations were given during the previous task force. The Police Training Task Force was a result of unrest across Connecticut and country. Recommendations were shared which consisted of 7 recommendations.

Chairman McGraw thanked the presenters and shared appreciation to those in attendance. He asks members to compile a list of the 5 recommendations they would like to see. He asks members to focus on physical interactions with the public, police brutality and training. He states that people saw failed training in George Floyd's death. Chairman McGraw asks that members think about what they would like to see changed in police accountability.

Governor Lamont asks that there is a charge of the meeting and would like to know what the goal will be by the end of the year. Judiciary Co-Chairs Senator Winfield and Representative Stafstrom share their comments. Senator Winfield states that he has been working on this for three decades and states that the work of the task force is important because there will be an effort to make comprehensive changes through legislation soon and the work of the task force is just as important. Representative Stafstrom echoes the comments of Senator Winfield that it is not the intention to wait for the task force to produce recommendations.

Attorney General William Tong thanks the Task Force and comments that these discussions have been ongoing long before this moment. He states that he is happy to sit at the table as we have a role to hold people accountable.

Chief Mello agrees and appreciates everything that has been said. He notes that everyone involved needs to remember the task force recommendations produced from the Police Training Task Force in the Public Safety Committee. He states that Connecticut has mandated standards for police training but notes that it is the responsibility of police chiefs to manage culture. Chief Mello also states that Connecticut Police do not train with use of deadly force. He states the overhaul needs to be with culture and police officers are not equipped to train officers on culture and mental health.

Chairman McGraw agrees that police officers need to be trained. He discusses with Chief Mello that additional classes and trainings need to be had.

Task Force members contributed one thing they would like to see come out of the Task Force.

Chief State Attorney, Richard Colangelo: We need to look at a "less than lethal force" alternative. He has done investigations regarding lethal use of force and 2 or 3 of these investigations used a taser but that still didn't stop the persons from advancing, some with knives. Consequently, we need to use stronger de-escalation measures. We need to give officers immersion training in the communities they police.

Sgt. John Szewczyk: Speaking from his viewpoint as a president of a police union, Sgt. Szewczyk suggests Internal Affairs needs to go by the wayside. We can't let police investigate police as it potentially plants an unfair bias on the investigation. These same officers may have gone to the Academy together or may have worked together. External, independent, non-biased investigations of police officers should be mandatory. There are some good investigations out there. The officer who ended George Floyd's life had 16 violations. Who performed these investigations? We need to have above reproach investigations that are transparent and accountable to the public.

Ken Barone (alternate for Marc Pelka): Mentions the President's 6 Pillars-that need to be the roadmap for guiding us in going forward. Before anything can happen, one specific area to focus on is to change the culture of policing. Training can be great but the officers have to buy-in to the training to get that message. Mr. Barone recalled his experience as a trainer for the City of Hartford and other police departments. The training wasn't as effective as anticipated as the officers had an implicit bias that no one could understand them unless it was another police officer. The culture of policing has to be addressed as there is a divide in law enforcement where many don't even acknowledge that racial disparity exists.

Chief William Wright: Law enforcement must listen with empathy & understanding & knowing their community is critically important. It will be very difficult to effectuate change unless the direct supervisors don't strongly send that message to officers. Collectively there are so many tests for suitability of officers but if the bad actors persist, all the training they have done will be lost without constant drilling down of the ideals. First line supervisor accountability is crucial. The community expects these officers be trained properly and exhibit appropriate policing.

Representative Josh Hall: We need to stop downplaying these issues. We owe it to ourselves and residents of the state, especially black/brown/African American/Hispanic communities who are disparately impacted. We have made progress but from his perspective, he fundamentally disagrees with police officers on what accountability looks like. He states that the responsibility of police officers is to protect the public. Community oversight is huge. You can have all the training in the world but if the police think they are free from any responsibility for their actions they feel protected from consequence. The community should contribute to how they should be protected from police.

Deputy Chief Maggie Silver: She grew up in Waterbury and the police force wasn't representative of her. She states that in order for culture to change, the community needs to be involved. Community programs are always the first to be cut. We need to give people a different outlook on police who may not look and sound like the community and only have contact when there is a negative situation. The community are the police's customers and it is the responsibility of the police to bridge relationships.

Chief Thomas Kulhawik: He states that the hands of police chiefs cannot be tied when taking the actions they would like to take. He states that Norwalk has an early intervention program. Any accredited department must have an intervention system, and that system can always be improved. Chiefs need to recognize their police officers' mental health may not what it should be, intervene and get them the early help they need. Police chiefs hands cannot be tied by labor unions if an officer needs corrective or discipline action. The police chiefs need the ability to not just identify any problems but the ability to correct such problems. In dealing with mental health issues, chiefs need to recognize they may need to partner with mental health professionals in certain situations where an officer is not equipped to handle the necessary de-escalation.

Rev. Stephen Cousin: Echoes what other members said and explains the issue of officers feeling threatened which absolve the officer of any responsibility for the use of lethal force. That term is purely subjective and officers should undergo periodic psychological evaluations to determine if such officers are mentally capable of holding a gun when someone's life is in danger.

Shafiq Abdussabur: This task force should not be a discussion board every time they meet and requests a more direct strategy. He notes that there are certain stages that need to occur at certain times. He comments that DMV equipment violations should not be the responsibility of law enforcement and these stops highly impact disenfranchised citizens. Especially in poor communities, police should only be responsible to respond in certain situations such as domestic violence & robberies. Police should not be stopping for "suspicious vehicles" and chasing stolen cars. There should be one universal, state-wide, shared complaint system.

Jonathan Slifka: Comments on the impact on the disability community. He encourages ongoing conversations with professionals in the field, nonprofit organizations and disabled citizens to find out what interactions and experiences they have had with law enforcement and how the disabled community can help in finding solutions.

Commissioner Rovella: The charge of the task force is accelerated and things that can be mandated are policies and procedures in police departments, use of body cameras. He agreed supervisory levels are important. Trust among law enforcement and communities can be broken in seconds. You need to have a heart for what you do and listen intently to the community.

Karen Boisvert, Administrator of the POST Academy handles training and states that the training should reflect and support the cultural shift occurring right now.

Ken Barone requests that a portion of the next meeting should be dedicated to going through the 6 pillars, 59 recommendations and 92 action items from Police Training Task Force.

Chairman McGraw agrees with Ken Barone and states that Campaign Zero, which Representative Hall mentioned should be discussed as well. He asks if anyone would like to add to the discussion.

Ken Barone suggests there should be subgroups for this task force from major topic areas. Data, transparency, mental/physical disabilities and any other subgroups that should be included. Chairman McGraw adds "community" as a subgroup. Andrew Clark comments that communities need resources and funding and it should be looked at.

Chairman McGraw comments on the hurdles the task force will face but he is prepared to do this. He announces the next meeting to be held Monday June 22.

Meeting adjourned at 3:22pm.