

June 17, 2020

Sen. Jeanette White, Chair
Senate Government Operations Committee

Dear Sen. White:

I was glad to observe the Committee's law enforcement discussion yesterday focusing on recruiting, hiring and training. I'm writing you as a member of the Community Equity Collaborative of the Brattleboro Area (CEC) and as a member of their Diverse Workforce Development Committee; however, I am not representing the membership of those groups. I write as a community member who does not interact regularly on law enforcement issues, although I have learned a lot from the participation of the Brattleboro Police Chief Fitzgerald and Captain Carrigan in our CEC meeting discussions. Likewise, the contributions of our NAACP, The Root Social Justice Center, and Vermont Partnership are significant influences.

Training: An overarching wish I have is that a unified ongoing anti-bias training curriculum could link the Police Academy, the Vermont State Police and all 50 police departments in our state. Training efforts seem segmented and restricted by content, time and resources. It is not clear across our state that local police department leadership have the incentive or ability to create ongoing training reinforcing the Academy's coursework. At times, online courses are viewed as sufficient when trainer-to-student personal engagement would be significantly more meaningful. Four hours of anti-bias training at the Police Academy for new recruits with a refresher every other year is not sufficient to impact a white supremacist law enforcement culture where it exists.

Responding to Community Needs: During this past March, Assistant AG David Scherr reached out to me, CEC members (including Brattleboro Town Manager Peter Elwell) and the NAACP of Windham County to follow up on a community forum hosted by the AG in Brattleboro on October 17. Similar forums were held in 2019 in Winooski, Hartford, and Rutland. The purpose was to hear how issues related to racism impact our neighbors of color and our whole community. A June forum was planned for Bennington, but is postponed due to COVID-19.

On March 30, we requested David Scherr and his staff prepare a summary of the priority concerns that came out of each community forum. This background information can inform us of statewide concerns vs. concerns unique to each community. A summary could also influence the content of future law enforcement training curricula. We hope to see that summary soon.

A focus for the NAACP and the CEC is how to respond effectively when harassment occurs that is not a crime? When a hateful incident occurs that is not a hate crime, how can law enforcement partner with community allies to engage the perpetrators effectively? How can restorative justice be employed at every opportunity? The CEC, NAACP and other equity-related coalitions would be resources in the development of a Brattleboro pilot. Any police

officer and dispatcher job description and training curricula would need to include an emphasis on the “community cultural competency” required to make such a pilot succeed.

The COVID-19 pandemic response created a pause in this work with David Scherr. The June 6 Brattleboro protest honoring George Floyd brought out over 1000 diverse members of our community, a red flag indicating the need to re-focus our energies on this pilot along with much more.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my comments.

With appreciation,

Diana Wahle