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Created on Friday, 05 June 2020 16:31

Hits: 147

Police Policy

Dear Editor: Below is a letter I sent to Police Chief Baty Thursday at the Sitka Police Department. I have to admit I have never taken the time to read many policies of any of our city departments and I understand that reflects on my privilege as a white woman in this country. I look forward to hearing back from the Chief and engaging in productive discussions to implement these policies.

Dear Chief Baty: As part of the awakening of much of our citizenry to the role police departments play in systemic racism I have looked at the "8 Can't Wait" policies, eight evidence-based policies that national leaders are recommending be enacted in all police departments, immediately (8cantwait.org). Each of these policies has been shown to significantly reduce violent interactions between police and the public. Taken together they reduce this violence by 72 percent. They are listed below.

1. Ban chokeholds and strangleholds
2. Require De-escalation
3. Require Warning before Shooting
4. Exhaust all other means before shooting
5. Duty to intervene
6. Ban shooting at moving vehicles
7. Require Use of Force Continuum
8. Require comprehensive reporting

I have read the online Sitka Police Manual (<http://sitkapd.com/documents/SPDOPM.pdf>) and if I understand it correctly, it appears that only one of the eight items is currently required and that is comprehensive reporting. While the manual recommends a warning before shooting, it does not require it.

Although Sitka has had few documented incidents of police misconduct, there have been some, including the tazing of Franklin Hoogendorn while in custody, and we would be dishonest to pretend the problem of racism against Black people, Alaska Natives, and other people of color does not exist in our community. Therefore, it seems a perfect time to make changes to Sitka Police Department policies in line with the national call for 8 Can't Wait. I believe adoption of these standards will be an important step towards a more just Sitka and will also benefit our police, as it will help to anticipate and prevent deadly use of force, traumatic for all involved.

I look forward to hearing from you on whether I understand the current policies and also your thoughts on how we can work together to move this agenda forward. I plan on submitting this letter as a letter to the editor so we can include other voices in the conversation as well.

Tory Curran, Sitka