

## SUMMARY OF HOSTED COMMUNITY MEETINGS

### Week of September 12, 2022

The Monitor met with several groups of community members while in Bakersfield the week of September 12, 2022. There was a publicized meeting with a group of community members on September 12, at 6:00 pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church. Over 30 community members attended this discussion. Other discussions occurred during the week at different locations.

Each meeting began with introductions of the Bakersfield Police Monitor Team members, an overview of the stipulated agreement and a summary of progress to date.

The community focused on their experiences with and perceptions of the Bakersfield Police Department's response time and staffing issues, engagement with the community, perceived lack of respect of the community by BPD and the need for the BPD to transform its policies and practices.

Discussions covered a range of areas and the following is a summary of comments received during the sessions.

### Response Times and Staffing

- Community Members expressed concern about BPD's slow response times to 911 calls and their perceived lack of presence in the community. Some noted that they recognized that the department is understaffed.
- Participants discussed alternatives to calling 911 for non-emergency calls. For example they suggested that community members need to be aware of the department's non-emergency number (327-7111), as well as other ways to contact the department such as through the BPD's Community Relations Unit (CRU) or by contacting an area sergeant or the on-duty watch commander.
- Some noted that community members are often not aware of other city services that could be contacted for non-emergency issues and that more efforts should be made to provide a city directory of services to residents.

### Community Engagement

- In addition to the concern that residents do not see enough officers in the community, they said that the department does not have local beat cops anymore who know the neighbors and the neighborhood and can build relationships with the community. They said that this used to occur at BPD. While a few participants said they knew some BPD officers well enough to say hello, others did not. Participants noted that the disconnect with the community is caused by slower response in the community and fewer relationships.
- Some commented that it was positive that the BPD has a large concentration of officers that live within the city limits of Bakersfield, however, others noted that many of those officers do not live in the neighborhoods that have concerns about crime.



- While a participant said that many officers seem to be disdainful of community members, another participant noted that some officers do care about the community, get involved and listen to people.
- Participants noted that businesses and other institutions in East Bakersfield are part of the community and that the BMT and BPD should reach out to them as well.

## Bias

- As in past community sessions, participants continue to express concern regarding harassment and racial profiling by the BPD. For example, a participant shared a story about being stopped by the police. On the one hand one traffic stop went smoothly, and he had no concern about the police behavior. To this individual, it was a positive encounter despite being stopped for a traffic violation. On the other hand, during a stop at another time the police told this same individual they looked like a suspect in the area. This individual felt that they had been profiled because of their race.
- There was discussion about BPD engaging in unjustified stops and searches. Some felt it was based upon bias or location, while others discussed its impact on them personally and on members of their families.
- A community member noted that members of the BIPOC community have been victims of racism in policing and throughout our society as a whole. While they were supportive of the BPD, they were concerned that BPD does not understand how the department is perceived or care about how the department is perceived.
- It was raised that in some communities, the BPD regularly has too much presence when conducting seemingly routine duties. The community identified this is a form of over-policing and not necessary for simple calls for service or traffic stops that are not high risk.
- Some participants said that BPD surveillance at funerals is chilling. A community member noted that if the deceased or others attending the funeral have or had gang affiliation then they label attendees as gang members and notify parole agents. Community members told the BMT that BPD will arrest and charge people with a gang related offense for attending the funeral services. It was further suggested that BPD identifies people as gang members based on where they live or their family relationships, without independent verification.

## Communication and Language Access

- Communication issues also were a topic of discussion. BMT members noted that the team has several mechanisms for outreach to the community and is looking for assistance and ideas for further spreading that outreach such as providing community locations in a variety of neighborhoods for future events and listening sessions.
- The group discussed the need for the BPD to communicate rights to citizens when stopped. Participants noted that other police departments are pushing these communications out and the ACLU has provided resources about rights. The host for the meeting works with BPD and noted that they will share resources with the community as well.



- There was discussion about communication from the Monitor and the need to be more visible in our process and reporting the outcome of the Judgment. We discussed the website and other possible communication vehicles. For example, the Monitor will now establish Spanish translations for written documents and the website.
- Language access continued to be a concern as discussed in previous community sessions. Some expressed that there not enough officers who speak Spanish on all shifts and this is a challenge. The BMT confirmed that language access is a part of the stipulated judgement, that the community has a right to these services.
- Some community members discussed violence in the neighborhoods and identified there is need for additional support by way of resources and specifically counselors to assist with trauma counseling.
- It was identified that literacy in some communities is low, so there is a desire to see documents and information presented in ways that are more easily understood.

### Police Practices

- There were discussions about the use of surveillance cameras. Community members did not understand the reason for their placement and questioned whether they were put in places that would provide deterrence to crime. Some raised their concerns over pervasive surveillance. An example was raised of a park where there are cameras.
- The community identified that BPD turns the lights off before the park is officially closed to deter access to the park when it should be open and accessible to the public. Those raising this issue did not understand the reasons this is being done and felt it was improper.
- The community commented on the need for training and to ensure officers receive it. There was recognition that this is required to improve policing. One community member observed some training at the BPD training academy and felt that it was not much improved. The BMT noted that the Judgment required training as a component of compliance for each paragraph. The BMT also informed the community that BPD has not reached the stage of introducing new training that would be part of the requirements of the stipulated judgment.

### Complaints and Misconduct

- Some community members raised issues about excessive use of force used by BPD. For some this was also evidenced in how the department responded to their calls for service. One participant stated that they were recently the victim of BPD's excessive force. The Monitoring Team met with this community member afterward and directed them to available reporting options.
- There was discussion about the hesitancy to report issues of misconduct and excessive force by BPD. Some felt that it is driven by a lack of trust. Others identified that there is little information about who and when to contact resources within the BPD. Others relayed frustration with a lack of accountability and transparency with the complaints process. One community member noted



that after making a complaint, they did not receive any further information but continued to see the officer in the community.

### Additional Topics

- The group discussed the need for reform of the BPD and the community and monitor role in holding the BPD accountable to compliance with the stipulated judgement and improving its relationship with the community. There was visible frustration among all of the groups about the length of time for reform. The BMT noted that compliance measures were developed for the SJ and that the California DOJ will expect the BPD to make progress in complying with these measures. The BMT also noted that the Community Advisory Panel (CAP) is moving forward – the policy and application process has been posted on the BPD's website and it is expected that the CAP will begin near the end of 2022. The BMT also noted that the BPD is in the process of hiring a communications coordinator to help develop a strategy on community engagement.
- A participant noted that BPD officers outside of Chief Terry do not look like they are sold on the SJ or eager to implement change. They noted that they had seen a demonstration of this at a principled policing class where police and residents were training together – at breaks most of the police grouped together and appeared as if they did not want to be there. They said that success depends on the department's understanding and willingness to change and indicated that BMT needs to look at how culture impacts this.
- Participants expressed that the department needs to evolve along with the community. They noted that lots of good officers have died, moved away or retired. They noted that the Bakersfield community has grown over the past decades and the color and culture of the community has changed as part of this growth. They expressed concern that hiring and recruitment efforts in the community are not resulting in a department that reflects the culture and community makeup.
- Several participants encouraged others to become more involved in the community, such as with neighborhood watch, but not only police related efforts.