

It is an honor to be here today with Lt. Sonya Zollicoffer, Retired Captain Joe Perez, and Lt. Thomas Boone.

These officers have committed themselves to race equity within the department because they recognize that it is essential to justice in the workplace, but also critical to the encounters between police and residents of the county.

Racial injustice and an inequitable culture inside Department significantly influences the behavior of officers on the street. These officers have come forward because they care deeply both about the job, but also about the community.

Fair, equitable, and effective policing requires that there is shared trust between police officers, their police department and the many and diverse communities that live in the county. A critical component of trust building is genuine engagement between the public and the department that begins with candor and transparency. The recommendations of the Hispanic National Law Enforcement

Association and the United Black Police Officers Association, if seriously considered and addressed, will be an important beginning to rebuilding trust between the Prince Georges County Police Department and communities that they serve.

I would like to highlight three recommendations in addition to those that have been discussed by the officers:

First, The Prince Georges County Police Department should review and revise its use of force policies, practices and training. Police officers are among the few public officials authorized to use force, including deadly force, in their official capacity. The use of force is among the most controversial areas of policing and understandably is a flash point in community relations. Even when the force used is constitutional, it can be contrary to the values of the community. Unnecessary or excessive uses of force undermine trust and legitimacy in an entire department. Moreover, force that may be legally authorized may not be appropriate and may well be viewed as illegitimate by members of the community. While the Prince Georges County

Police Department requires that police act lawfully, it places no other limitation on officer conduct. Unlike most modern departments, de-escalation and force avoidance practices are not required.

A comprehensive overhaul of use of force practices is essential in a County where people of color make up a majority of the population and experience the overwhelming majority of police encounters. There is a long history of excessive, unnecessary, and in some cases lethal force against Black people, including incidents in recent months. The Department needs to adopt policies and practices that value human life and dignity above all without regard to race.

Second. Police practices with regard to pedestrian and traffic stops have a significant influence on the way that members of the community perceive policing. Illegitimate stops and those motivated by bias not only undermine trust and confidence, but place community members at risks. Far too many high profile incidents start with a stop of dubious origin. The County should overhaul its policies and practices to prohibit consideration of

race in routine law enforcement practices. The guidance from the Department of Justice is a good starting point. The County needs to make sure that each Officer starts the job without the assumption that a Black or Brown person is automatically a criminal.

To ensure that stop and search practices comply with policy and that all persons are treated with dignity regardless of race, robust tracking, analysis and public reporting on stops and searches will be required, together with an independent review of stop and search incidents.

As with force, these incidents should not be evaluated simply whether the conduct was legally “justified,” but whether it was appropriate. Every evaluation of these incidents should consider whether the officer has a pattern of similar conduct indicative of bias or discrimination. The assessment of patterns of discrimination or bias needs to be conducted outside the chain of command. For officers who display such bias, there should be progressive discipline.

Third, police officers are entitled to fair, just and equitable treatment. The pattern of race discrimination and the toxic culture in the police department has harmed many officers of color. Immediate steps are necessary to ensure that officers who are subject to discrimination have an effective avenue of redress. The Department should revise its EEO complaint policy so that complaints can be made outside the chain of command and are confidential. The Department should establish a dedicated corps of investigators trained on EEO investigations to investigate external and internal complaints of discrimination, bias, harassment and retaliation.

Moreover, to ensure that race equity becomes the culture of the department, all officers (regardless of rank) should have annual anti-discrimination, anti-retaliation, anti-harassment, and implicit bias training.

These measures are important first steps to ensuring that officers of color are treated fairly, that police services are delivered without bias and to begin to build community trust.

Thank you.