



December 7, 2016

Council President Stark
310-D City Hall 15 Kellogg Blvd., West
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Council President Stark and members of the St. Paul City Council,

The ACLU-MN respectfully urges the Council to transform the city's Police-Civilian Internal Affairs Review Commission ("the Commission") into an all-Civilian Review Commission by removing police officers from the commission. Having an empowered review authority that consists solely of civilians is an important step towards establishing trust between St. Paul Police Officers and the community they serve.

We can all agree that public safety depends on the police department and community members working together. But recent incidents in Minnesota and across this country have laid bare the chasm between the police and the communities they serve, especially communities of color. By undertaking the work of reformulating the Commission, the St. Paul City Council has an opportunity to improve the culture of policing, which will in turn improve the relationship between police and communities. This culture, as it currently exists often results in significant mistrust between law enforcement and our low income communities and communities of color; and it also results in police use of excessive force, including the killing of unarmed black men, with little accountability.

One only needs to paint a quick picture of the state of policing to understand the dire need for reform. In the ACLU report, "The War on Marijuana: In Black and White," our organization highlighted significant racial disparities in Marijuana possession arrests.¹ The study found that in Ramsey County, Black people are 7.4 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites, the second-worst racial disparity for any county in Minnesota. As the largest city in Ramsey County, St. Paul bears a significant responsibility for that disparity. Racial profiling, over-policing and biased policing of our most marginalized communities, as well as police violence against communities of color are all too common in Minnesota. This is not what policing in the 21st century should look like.

The disconnect between law enforcement and the communities they serve can be partially explained by an "us versus them" mentality. Although the St. Paul Police

¹ Available at <https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/aclu-thewaronmarijuana-rel2.pdf>.

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Department promotes a community policing model, police/community relations often fall far short of that, lacking communication, trust, and accountability. An all-civilian review commission that is composed of a diverse group of community members is one response. This is not an unprecedented idea and other cities have included all-civilian review authorities as part of an effort to improve policing. For example, the 2002 collaborative agreement in Cincinnati was engaged both the police and everyday citizens to invest in the neighborhood and make their environment a better place for both groups. In addition to improvements in policing practices, like regular police foot patrols and weekly community meetings, the collaborative agreement established a citizen review board. The success of Cincinnati's Citizen Complaint Authority has been attributed to improvements in due process for officers and community members, speedy results, independence from the police department, and transparency to the community.

The City of St. Paul could also look to the example being set by the City of Newark, New Jersey, which recently established one of the strongest civilian complaint review boards in the nation.² Unfortunately, it took a U.S. Department of Justice civil rights investigation and its findings of significant civil rights violations before the city agreed to make changes.

We respectfully urge the St. Paul City Council to use this opportunity to put the police department on the path towards greater accountability and stronger relationships between police and the community by establishing an all-civilian review commission.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Teresa Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Teresa Nelson
ACLU-MN Legal Director

² <https://www.aclu.org/blog/speak-freely/newarks-new-cop-watch-board-should-be-national-model-police-accountability>