

# Civilians should lead review of police conduct

BY ANN MONGOVEN AND  
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As the St. Paul City Council debates whether or not to include police officers as members of the civilian review board, those deliberations should take seriously current challenges in police and civilian relationships in our city and throughout the nation. Policing resulted in the tragic death of Philando Castile and the brutal beating of Frank Baker, both partly caught on video. These were not isolated events but part of the bigger reality of how communities of color experience policing. We know we need to do better.

As people of faith, it is important to us that every citizen experience St. Paul as a place where they are seen and loved by the community. That is why it is critical we have a civilian review board that has the full trust and confidence of the community as a board where complaints are fully heard and weighed without the undue influence of the institutions that are being challenged.

The City Council is helping lead the way by strengthening civilian input in the Police Civilian Internal Affairs Review Commission (PCIARC), which reviews cases of alleged police misconduct and makes recommendations to the police chief when civilians file complaints against officers. Many changes have been proposed for the PCIARC, and we support several of them. These include moving the PCIARC to the Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity office; increasing the number of civilian commissioners for greater diversity; improving the tracking of data; providing more training on implicit bias, racism, trauma, mental health and gender identity; and removing police officers from the PCIARC.

To maintain its credibility with the community, a civilian review commission must remain fundamentally a civilian body. An all-civilian commission is the most respectful way for community recommendations to be developed. It offers a critical counterbalance to investigations led by the police department. Most American cities do not include police on these kinds of commissions. Two independent audits have recommended that the PCIARC impanel only civilians. PCIARC's role should be to help police better understand the civilians' perspective on why some interactions go awry, and that can best be done with deliberations among civilians.

When lawyers are choosing juries, they purposefully exclude lawyers because they become the voice of authority in the discussion and other jurors defer to their opinion. In

cases of medical malpractice, doctors are kept off of juries because of their special level of expertise and bias. Keeping police off of a civilian review board follows this same common-sense line of reasoning. To have a truly balanced community conversation, St. Paul needs the insights that only an all-civilian PCIARC can provide.

This does not mean that the civilian commissioners would have no interaction with the police. In fact, PCIARC members have a police department orientation as part of their training and can call upon the police for specialized input whenever they feel it is needed. We might also consider a structured pathway for input from law enforcement, short of full participation in deliberations and voting.

We must speak frankly and admit that the incidents of police brutality are racialized, and there is a need for the PCIARC to reflect the communities that are most affected. It is only by creating a truly inclusive process that we will be able to raise trust, lower tension and create processes untainted by bias.

As so many other cities have found, allowing an all-civilian discussion of complaints against police is an important step toward these goals. We must also look at removing any barriers for having community members whom we all want to sit on the board be available to participate.

Police do an important, difficult job, and we want them to have a voice in the review process. We support the police department continuing to conduct its own Internal Affairs investigations of complaints. We support the police chief having the final say on discipline. We simply believe that having an all-civilian commission conducting parallel, independent investigations will protect the integrity of the process and provide the police with a critical view that can play an important role in police conduct and overall police reform. It will also go a long way toward reassuring citizens that their voices matter to the police.

The City Council will be accepting public comments on the PCIARC at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, December 7, in City Hall. We urge citizens to contact their council members to thank them for the positive changes they are making and to encourage them to listen to the people and create an all-civilian PCIARC.

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