

BERKELEY POLICE REVIEW COMMISSION MEMO TO POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD

On May 26, the PRC sent out a survey to residents to provide some preliminary insight into how Berkeley residents perceive the process by which residents may file complaints about alleged police misconduct with the PRC. A final question was intended to gauge whether people know they may file a commendation of particular officers. An additional goal of the survey was simply to publicize the existence of the PRC and the transition to the PAB.

The Outreach Subcommittee of the PRC, with the assistance of Investigator Byron Norris, wrote the questions for the survey/poll, and SurveyMonkey was employed for its execution. The responses to the survey are anonymous. The Subcommittee comprised a list of organizations and their leaders across Berkeley, hoping to reach a broad swath of the population (it is possible that some respondents reside in neighboring communities), and asked these groups to send the survey out to their members. In addition, PRC Commissioners were asked to forward the survey to other individuals and groups that they knew individually. A total of 258 individuals responded to the survey. Members of the Outreach Subcommittee, and the PRC generally, are aware that this cannot pretend to be a scientific survey, as the respondents by no means comprise a scientifically random sample. Nonetheless, we believe that the quantitative and qualitative responses may provide some useful information as the PAB moves forward.

Before providing a summary of the results, we would like to mention two aspects of the survey that we would revise if we were to repeat the endeavor. First, as one respondent mentioned in a personal email, it would have been useful to have one demographic question inquiring about the respondent's racial identification, age, sexual orientation, etc. We intentionally tried to make this survey as brief and quick to complete as possible; however, this demographic information—as well as questions about the PRC policy review process--would have been useful. Second, as mentioned by several respondents, we should have allowed respondents to check more than one answer to some questions (for example, question #3 which asks why a person has not filed any complaints).

SURVEY RESPONSE SUMMARY

Perhaps not surprisingly, the results of the survey (again, not based on a random sample) reveal some polarization of the population regarding both the BPD and the PRC. For example, when respondents were provided the opportunity to volunteer additional feedback (question #8), nine respondents expressed their appreciation for the job the BPD does, while eleven respondents raised concerns they have with the PBD and/or suggested police reforms.

Similarly, while ten respondents complained that the PRC is biased against the police (and eight others wrote that the oversight agency is ineffective or a waste of money), three respondents wrote that the PRC does a good job or were thankful to the PRC, five others called for further empowering the PRC and/or complainants, and five called for further informing the public about the PRC.

Only three respondents (1%) said they had filed a complaint with the PRC. In the future, outreach efforts might consider specifically reaching out to former complainants. Those who had not filed said they had not filed because they had no complaints (75%); did not know they could file or how to do it (11%); thought nothing would come of it (8%); said they had only a minor issue (5%); or felt intimidated or feared retaliation (1.5%). While only 3 people said they had filed a complaint, eight respondents answered the question about whether they were satisfied with the process, with six of these saying they were not satisfied. One person wrote that they had complained to their Council Member and the Council Member did not inform them about the possibility of filing a complaint with the PRC.

One thing is clear from the survey: Further outreach is required to inform the public of the existence of the oversight body and to explain its functions, while at the same time listening to their concerns. In response to question #1, which asked how familiar the respondent is with the PRC, 48% said they had never heard of it (12%) or did not know much about it (36%). Part of any outreach effort might include a memo to City Council Members requesting that when they receive complaints about the BPD from constituents, they inform them about the possibility of filing a complaint with the PAB.