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Former Police Reform Commissioners Urge DC Council and Mayor Bowser to Implement Report Recommendations

Urgent need to improve public safety as violent crime in D.C. increases

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 15, 2021 - Former members of DC's Police Reform Commission (PRC) sent a letter to the DC Council and Mayor Muriel Bowser on Friday, November 12th, urging the immediate adoption of recommendations from its final report: *Decentering Police to Improve Public Safety*.

Since the PRC issued its report in April of 2021, numerous individuals experienced police violence, including Terrance Parker, Vedo Hall, Antwan Gilmore, George Watson, and DeAndre Johnson who were fatally shot by Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers in questionable circumstances that raised significant community outrage. The letter encourages swift implementation of reforms that would reduce both community and police-instigated violence.

"Relying on MPD alone for public safety doesn't work," said Commission Co-Chair Robert Bobb. "The District has the resources and the ability to enact measures that focus on the stability and well-being of marginalized communities, rather than on the current practice of over-policing communities with ineffective and unnecessarily aggressive tactics."

"We acknowledge and appreciate the actions the Mayor and the Council have taken thus far to implement measures the Commission identified as necessary to ensure effective community safety in the District," said Commission Co-Chair Christy Lopez. "But the progress made so far is not adequate to address the problems that District communities face. Our letter recommends actions the Council and Mayor should prioritize to put the District on the right path towards meaningful and substantially improved community safety for all its residents."

To assist policy makers in prioritizing key reforms, the letter identifies what can and should be implemented most urgently:

1. The MPD should implement three policy changes immediately: impose a moratorium on the Gun Recovery Unit and the Crime Suppression Teams;¹ prohibit all pretext stops²

¹ PRC recommendation §5-1

² PRC recommendations §5-4(a), (f)

and consent searches;³ and train officers specifically on the constitutional requirements of protective pat downs.⁴

2. The Council can quickly resolve four PRC recommendations by repealing the following statutes: D.C. Code § 37-131.08(b) which authorizes incarceration for vending without a license;⁵ D.C. Code §§ 22-2301 – 2306, which authorizes incarceration for panhandling;⁶ D.C. Code §5-105.05, which requires a minimum of 3000 officers;⁷ and D.C. Code §16-1031, which mandates arrests for intrafamily offenses.⁸
3. The Council can dramatically reduce the danger of unnecessary police-civilian contact if it makes any evidence found during consent searches inadmissible to deter officers from engaging in this practice;⁹ prohibits home search warrants for cases based on allegations of the presence of drugs or drug activity;¹⁰ and disarms special police officers.¹¹

The PRC report, which was released on April 1, 2021, recommends measures to strengthen community safety net programs, enlist a broader set of responders for residents who need help, eliminate aggressive policing tactics that have proven harmful or ineffective, and hold the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to greater transparency and accountability. The Commission cites an urgent need to improve public safety for all residents of the District of Columbia, as the number of incidents involving police misconduct and police violence continues to rise, especially within disadvantaged communities. These recommendations were informed by eight months of meetings and discussions with leadership from the MPD, representatives from the Office of the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, subject matter experts, community-based organizations, and concerned citizens.

In an effort to increase transparency and government accountability, former commissioners of the PRC plan to reconvene early next year and issue a report card that details which elected officials have taken a leadership role in advancing the Commission's recommendations. A copy of the full report is available on the Police Reform Commission's [website](#).

A copy of the letter sent to DC Council members and Mayor Bowser is available upon request.

³ PRC recommendation §5-8. The Youth Rights Amendment Act of 2021 creates a disincentive for conducting consent searches of children, but it does not actually prohibit the practice for children, nor does it prohibit the practice with adults.

⁴ PRC recommendation §5-7

⁵ PRC recommendation §2-4; see *also* B24-0049, Street Vending Decriminalization Amendment Act of 2021.

⁶ PRC recommendation §2-4

⁷ PRC recommendation §7-4

⁸ PRC recommendation §1-6(c)

⁹ Jon Choi, Ramsey County Attorney, will no longer prosecute non-felony cases that stem from most pretext stops or consent searches of vehicles.

<https://www.twincities.com/2021/10/03/ramsey-county-traffic-stops-heres-the-new-policy-and-its-potential-impact/amp/>

¹⁰ PRC recommendation §5-13

¹¹ PRC recommendation §5-27. Special Police Officers are not required to have the same level of training in the use of firearms as MPD officers and their ability to carry firearms is not sufficiently regulated.

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ABOUT THE DC POLICE REFORM COMMISSION

The DC Police Reform Commission was established by DC Council Act 23-336. The purpose of the Commission is to examine policing practices and provide evidence-informed recommendations to reform and reimagine policing in the District. The DC Police Reform Commission includes 20 leading experts and advocates with decades of experience who for the past eight months held more than five meetings every week to listen carefully to the community, organizations, and MPD; review information that was provided, and develop thoughtful, well-supported recommendations.