



# Summary Report:

December 2021 Community Listening Sessions

*This report is prepared for the Connecticut Police Transparency & Accountability Task Force*

*By The IMRP Research Team*

January 11, 2022

## **Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force: December 2021 Community Listening Sessions Summary Report**

In December of 2021 the Connecticut Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force (PTATF) hosted three community listening sessions in three distinct communities within the Greater Hartford region to discuss elements of the task force's work. The purpose of the sessions was to present the task force's recommendations relative to both the Public Awareness and Improving Police Interactions with the Disability Community (IPIDC) subcommittees to the respective audiences, to answer questions, and to take critical feedback on the recommendations. The panel for the sessions consisted of:

1. Daryl McGraw (PTATF Chair)  
Senior Reentry Analyst, Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy, University of Connecticut
2. John "Jack" Drumm (PTATF member)  
Chief of Police, Madison Police Department
3. Maggie Vargas-Silver, PhD (PTATF member)  
Deputy Police Chief, University of Connecticut Police Department
4. Jonathan Slifka (PTATF member, IPIDC subcommittee Chair)  
Executive Assistant - Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services
5. Meghan Peterson, PhD (IPIDC research specialist)  
Research Analyst – Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy, University of Connecticut
6. Anne Li Kringen, PhD (Public Awareness research specialist)  
Associate Professor, University of New Haven; Training Academy Division Manager,  
Austin Police Department

The sessions were moderated by Andrew Clark of the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP) at the University of Connecticut and journalist Stan Simpson. The sessions were held in Hartford, West Hartford, and Farmington.

## Format and Agendas

The following contains a description of and agenda for each of the three sessions:

### **Community Policing: Where are We Now?**

Join the conversation with members of the CT Police Transparency & Accountability Taskforce and national expert [Dr. Anne Kringen](#) ([recently featured on 60 Minutes](#)). The Task Force will share its recommendations stemming from the [Public Awareness](#) and [Improving Police Interactions with the Disability Community Subcommittees](#). There will be a brief panel discussion followed by Q & A with audience members. Moderated by Stan Simpson.

All events will take place in person from 6-8pm. **Masks required.** Seating will be socially distanced. For more information, visit: <https://www.ctpolicetransparency.com/upcoming-sessions>

### **Monday, December 13, 2021 6-8pm West Hartford Town Hall**

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|--------|--|
| 6pm    | Light refreshments   |
| 6:15pm | Intro to PTATF and event   |
| 6:20pm | Dr. Anne Kringen, followed by Dr. Meghan Peterson  |
| 6:40pm | Panel Discussion: Stan Simpson – moderator <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Daryl McGraw, PTATF Chair and Chair, Public Awareness Subcommittee</li><li>• Chief Jack Drumm, Madison PD, PTATF member and IPIDC Subcommittee member</li><li>• Jon Slifka, PTATF member and IPIDC Chair</li><li>• Anne, Meghan</li></ul> |
| 7:20pm | Q&A – audience and online  |
| 8pm    | Close  |

**Tuesday, December 14, 2021 6-8pm Farmington Public Library**

- 6pm Light refreshments
- 6:15pm Intro to PTATF and event
- 6:20pm Presentation on PTATF Recommendations: Dr. Anne Kringen, followed by Dr. Meghan Peterson
- 6:40pm Panel Discussion: Stan Simpson – moderator
- Daryl McGraw, PTATF Chair and Chair, Public Awareness Subcommittee
  - Deputy Chief Maggie Silver, UConn PD, PTATF member and Public Awareness Subcommittee member
  - Jon Slifka, PTATF member and IPIDC Chair
  - Anne, Meghan
- 7:20pm Q&A – audience and online
- 8pm Close

**Wednesday, December 15, 2021 6-8pm Hartford Public Library (500 Main Street, CCC)\***

- 6pm Light refreshments
- 6:15pm Intro to PTATF and event
- 6:20pm Dr. Anne Kringen, followed by Andrew Clark
- 6:40pm Panel Discussion: Stan Simpson – moderator
- Chief Jack Drumm, Madison PD, PTATF member and IPIDC Subcommittee member
  - Deputy Chief Maggie Silver, UConn PD, PTATF member and Public Awareness Subcommittee member
  - Jon Slifka, PTATF member and IPIDC Chair
  - Anne
- 7:20pm Q&A – audience and online
- 8pm Close

*\* (Due to COVID complications, the Hartford event was moved entirely online to the Zoom platform)*

## Locations

The PTATF has held several virtual listening sessions through the course of its work. The Public Awareness subcommittee routinely contemplated in person sessions as a means of augmenting these experiences. Due to logistical complications resulting from the COVID pandemic, these sessions had proven difficult to schedule. Through the combination of a decreased positivity test rate in Connecticut and a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Travelers Championship, the IMRP was able to provide resources to the PTATF to host in person sessions in the Greater Hartford Region. In order to reach a diverse audience, the PTATF decided to host these sessions in three distinct municipalities along the Farmington Avenue Corridor: Hartford, West Hartford and Farmington.

**Hartford** has 121,054 residents. Residents are 36.0% White, 42.7% Black, 3.4% Asian, 1.2% Native American, and 23.7% other. A substantial Puerto Rican population resides in the city with over 33.7% of city residents claiming Puerto Rican heritage. An additional 9.7% of the population is non-Puerto Rican Hispanic. The city demonstrates substantial segregation with the Hispanic population concentrated on the south side of the city and the Black population concentrated on the north side of the city. Hartford's economy is growing in the technology sector; yet the city experienced a reduction in population between 2010 and 2020. 30.5% of Hartford residents live below the poverty line. Hartford has a high crime rate. In 2019, the crime rate in Hartford was higher than 90.3% of all U.S. Cities. Hartford experienced declining crime over the 5-year period preceding COVID, but crime rates in Hartford are substantially higher than the state average.

**West Hartford** has 64,083 residents and is situated 5 miles west of downtown Hartford. The town is predominantly White (79.6%). Black residents make up 6.3% of the population, and

Asian Residents make up 7.4% of the population. 9.8% of the population is Hispanic. Primary employers include the University of Hartford and the Town of West Hartford, as the majority of working residents are commuters. 3.7% of residents in West Hartford live below the poverty line. Like the other municipalities, West Hartford experienced declining crime over the 5 years proceeding COVID, and the crime rate is lower than the state average.

**Farmington** has a total of 26,712 residents. Residents are 85.9% White, 9.6% Asian, 2.2% Black, and 3.0% of residents are Hispanic. Home to several growing corporations, Farmington has a strong economy and is unique in that more people work in Farmington than live there. Only 5.8% of residents in Farmington live below the poverty line. Farmington experienced a 5-year decline in crime prior to COVID, and crime rates are lower than the state average. Comparable crime rates for the three municipalities are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Crime Rates<sup>1</sup> for Session Municipalities<sup>2</sup>**

	<b>Farmington</b>	<b>Hartford</b>	<b>West Hartford</b>
Murder rate	0	17.2	0
Robbery rate	11.8	221.7	47.7
Assault rate	3.9	593.9	8.0
Motor vehicle theft rate	109.7	436.0	133.6

### Presentation

The community listening sessions opened with a presentation by members of the panel. The presentation began with an overview of PTATF recommendations relative to racial and gender diversity in policing, ideological diversity, and representative bureaucracy. It followed with an overview of PTATF recommendations on improving police interactions with the

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<sup>1</sup> Rates reported per 100,000 population

<sup>2</sup> Reported for 2019 due to national anomalies related to COVID

disability community<sup>3</sup>. After providing this context, the panel presented eight specific recommendations for community feedback. These included:

1. Linking diversification goals to accreditation.
2. Establishing statewide promising practices regarding recruiting, hiring, training, and promotion.
3. Establishing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion unit within POST.
4. Increasing diversity among civilian staff including administrative, clerical, technology, social work, mental health, officer counseling, and victim services personnel.
5. The role of social workers in policing and in response to individuals with (or without) disabilities who have placed crisis calls to an emergency line (whether they have an intellectual, mental, physical disability or not)
6. The creation of a voluntary registry system for individuals in the disability community.
7. Police education and training relative to the disability community.
8. The role of school resource officers in the context of responding to students with (or without) disabilities and who experience crisis on school premises.

More generally, the panel discussed strategies to diversify the police workforce including strategies to increase minority and female participation in policing careers. As well, the panel acknowledged their recognition that diversification in policing ought to rightly extend to the disability community.

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<sup>3</sup> The Farmington and Hartford sessions followed the same format but started with a viewing of the CBS 60 Minutes episode featuring presenter Dr. Anne Kringen and her work with the Austin, Texas Police Department.

Other key issues discussed by the panel included evidence that most calls for service that receive police response are social service calls, along with research demonstrating that officers of color and female officers make fewer stops, make fewer arrests, and use less force. Moreover, the panel discussed the potentially lethal impact of police interaction on individuals suffering from mental illness, and reality that law enforcement alone cannot prevent crime. Structural factors like closing hospitals and lack of other social service resources were also discussed. Finally, the panel discussed staffing challenges facing many departments that are experiencing substantial attrition.

### Community Participation and Feedback

Community members who participated expressed a wide variety of views about policing and policing reform. While some participants worked in areas directly involved in criminal justice and criminal justice reform, several others brought their personal experiences to the discussion. This included individuals that had personal interactions with the police, that had previously been incarcerated, and that had experienced homelessness.

Surveys administered after the sessions revealed that participants almost exclusively agreed that they learned about policing, about diversity in policing, about police accountability, and about the relationship between communities of color and/or those with disabilities and the criminal justice system. While these responses indicate that the sessions were successful at providing attendees information about current issues and the proposed recommendations, many questions asked by the community participants unveiled key issues that the community members felt were important to consider or that they felt may have been left unaddressed by the recommendations.

Key issues raised by the community included:

1. Policing and social service calls.
2. Mental illness, disability, homelessness, and policing.
3. Equity issues and concerns about diversification as an effective solution.
4. Respect for community, trust, and transparency.

Comments and questions from participants were reviewed to provide insight about community concerns. The following sections outline these areas for consideration.

#### *Policing and Social Service Calls*

Community responses indicated that the potential unintended consequences of police handling social service calls remained a concern. Some community members mentioned police arriving on scene “in uniform and armed” potentially increasing tension or escalating situations. Other comments suggested that officers could do a better job of servicing these calls without resulting to formal criminal justice actions like arrest.

#### *Mental Health, Disability, Homelessness, and Policing*

Community members discussed mental health, disability, homelessness, and policing issues. Community members were concerned about potential ineffectiveness of trainings designed to prepare officers for these encounters. Moreover, community members expressed awareness of the interplay between drug use and mental health and disability creating substantial risk. Community members were seemingly aware of the lack of resources outside of policing and were critical of community leaders for not “providing answers.”

### *Equity Issues and Concerns about Diversification as an Effective Solution*

Community members discussed issues related to structural racism as well systemic issues such as the financial challenges faced by individuals that have been arrested. Key issues related to equity focused on differential treatment of Black and White individuals by the police in circumstances such as possessing a firearm, and community members expressed concern about diversification as a solution to equity challenges. One community member stated, “diversifying sounds good, but black and brown officers still kill people.”

### *Respect for Community, Trust, and Transparency*

Community members discussed respect for community, trust, and transparency as key issues. While some community members emphasized the need for accountability, particularly in the context of internal investigations and police misconduct, others suggested that trust might begin with officers knowing the communities that they serve. Some voiced the need to have officers learn the community before “getting a badge and a gun.” While the panel discussed this in the context of training opportunities, some community members expressed doubt asking how much police training can effectively teach “community engagement and empathy.” Moreover, some community members characterized the task force recommendations as simply repackaging community policing, emphatically stating that “community policing has never worked” and asked what would come after the issuance of the task force recommendations.

## Conclusion

The issues raised by community participants are important considerations as the task force's recommendations are implemented. In particular, the community questions and comments suggest that there are concerns about the extent to which diversification can change policing and the extent to which many reforms can be trained. Given the complexity of challenges facing modern policing, the concerns are well founded. However, evidence largely suggests that diversification is an important component of achieving institutional change in policing. While the presentation focused on the explicit differences relatable to officers of color and female officers (e.g, reduced likelihood to arrest, escalate, use force), the more important contribution to changing policing likely lies in the ideological diversification that was discussed. Bringing a diverse set of perspectives and beliefs into the policing domain is a necessary step that supports other elements of the reform puzzle.

Regarding the ability of training to address many of the challenges, it is important to note that the current state of policing reflects limited awareness of many of the issues and potential solutions available to departments. The task force's goal of making the recommendations is to support a context where promising practices can be isolated, shared, and trained to support change. Establishing a diversity, equity, and inclusion unit within POST will not result in change in and of itself. It does, however, generate the capacity for individuals within the unit to facilitate the changes necessary to support policing reform. In this way, the task force's recommendations reflect structural, albeit initial, steps toward increasing diversity, transparency, and accountability in policing in Connecticut.

Throughout the work of the IPIDC (Improving Police Interactions with the Disability Community) subcommittee, it has become clear that there is increased urgency to address law

enforcement approaches and responses to individuals who place crisis calls (with and without disabilities) in positive, practical, and substantive ways. This sentiment was shared by community members attending the December sessions as well. In conversations with representatives of, and stakeholders in, Connecticut’s disability community, the immediate need to focus attention on reducing violence and de-escalating encounters is vital. This corresponds with research showing Americans with disabilities are more likely to be victims than their peers across a range of crime categories.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to meaningfully addressing responses to crisis calls, there was consensus from participants that proactive relationship building is an equally important measure to undertake. Discussions with the state’s disability community have shown that centering attention on tangibly improving interactions between police and the disability community they protect and serve (of which law enforcement may be also be a member) is equally vital: namely, fostering, building, and maintaining conditions of reciprocal trust between the disability community and police. This can be achieved by opening day-to-day practices of communication, as well as continuing dialogues between police departments, the social workers and other personnel who respond to emergency calls, and the disability community.

Finally, the stated overarching concern of follow through on all PTATF recommendations is one that should be resolved. There is no formal link to the report’s recommendations and their implementation – either through legislative or administrative action. This may result in a general lack of trust in the process and could serve to undermine current and future efforts to engage the public in discourse on this topic.

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<sup>4</sup> “Crime Against Persons with Disabilities, 2009-2019.” Bureau of Justice Statistics, Department of Justice. November 2021.