

**TOWN OF ULSTER PUBLIC HEARING ON**  
**Police Reform& Reinvention Collaborative Committee**  
**January 20, 2021 @ 7:00pm**  
**Testimony of Laura Hartmann, 44 Catskill Ave, Town of Ulster**

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about an issue that has consumed this country for a good portion of 2020. These conversations are important, and we must be able to have a forum to talk about what is happening. I am happy to hear the reports I have had from Councilman Clayton Van Kleek and Committee member Wayne Spanier, comments on how well and diligently the committee has worked. I am also grateful that Chief Berardi has approached this task with an open mind and has been very generous with his time in answering questions. It speaks well of our citizenry and town officials.

While I have never directly experienced racism, I have observed what my African American clients and colleagues have experienced. I have worked for 30 years with black people working in the field of jazz. I have toured extensively throughout the world and all over this country with them. Their fear of being stopped by TSA agents is palpable. I have seen them profiled by police in all parts of the country. My brother or nephews or cousins never had to feel the way they do.

Profiling really does happen. The offenses around the country that have caused the convening of this committee are egregious.

It is heartening to read that the committee finds “no compelling evidence of random or systemic racial or other bias in the way the Town of Ulster Police Department interacts with the public.” It is also wise to “minimize the potential for biased policing” to make sure that it never happens in the Town of Ulster. Here are my comments.

Given the recent events at the U.S. Capitol, there should be a zero-tolerance policy for police officers being connected with white supremacist groups (KKK, Boogaloo Boys, etc) and fringe conspiracy theory organizations (QAnon, etc). Town of Ulster Police officers should not be involved in that culture.

In the **Recruitment, Hiring and Training** portion of the draft proposal, recruits are called youngsters. I would hope we would never refer to them, nor think of them, as youngsters, as we should be looking for emotionally mature young men and women.

Under **Policies and Procedures**, it is recommended that we “establish an unpaid civilian review board for critical police crisis oversight and feedback.” A similar suggestion is made under **Hiring** where the sub-committee recommends that “the interview process should be more formalized.”

I would suggest that a “civilian board” would be helpful in a few areas. Currently, a candidate is interviewed by Chief Berardi, and by the Personnel Committee which is comprised of members of the town council. Currently, the town board members are all white males in similar age brackets. Chief Berardi is a white male. This civilian board should be more diverse to reflect the population of the town and our visitor population.

In addition to interviewing new candidates, this civilian board could also review complaints, and do a periodic review of each officer. I would like to suggest the interviews – including to get the job - include real life video examples of police videos where confrontations happen between officers and a subject, and that the candidate is asked specific questions about the interactions.

In a long discussion with Chief Berardi, I was shocked to learn that in Ulster County, candidates for the police academy are only required to have a high school diploma or a GED. That could mean a candidate might be less than 20 when they become an officer. Are they mature enough at that point?

I believe that at least two years of college (which is provided at UCCC) could provide time to allow a candidate to mature. People go into a career with their own ideas on what it is. College gives preparation for what the job actually is, and a sense of reality. If these candidates are not getting that time to learn and assimilate to what being a police officer actually means, they are then leading with their inexperienced ideals.

Also, could we create a program for new, young officers that would not give them policing duties, but community duties for the first year or so. Could be done in conjunction with mental health agencies, so officers can get valuable experience in dealing with people in crisis situations? Would this give them better tools with which to diagnose a situation and find a way to diffuse it before it turns into a confrontation, or deadly?

They could also provide opportunities for police officers to interact with students, the disabled, people with mental disabilities to better understand them. It could also be an opportunity to do community outreach to train them how to interact with police.

The goal is to make sure our officers are really prepared for their job.

Creating a more trusting relationship between the police and the community is crucial to the success of any changes we want to see happen. We need to provide ways that we see each other and understand how we each might feel in a given situation. This is not a one-sided issue, we need to look at it from the police side and the public. It is in that spirit that I respectfully submit these remarks.