

More than 100 demand police reform outside Nassau County legislative building

By Robert Pelaez - December 15, 2020



More than 100 people gathered outside of the Nassau County Legislative Building in Mineola Thursday to demand more reform in law enforcement. (Photo by Robert Pelaez)

Chants of “No justice, no peace, no contract for the police” were heard outside the Nassau County legislative building in Mineola Thursday night as more than 100 people gathered to demand that the county not approve a new police labor contract until more public input is heard by officials.

Representatives from the Long Island Advocates for Police Accountability, Long Island United to Transform Policing & Community Safety, Young Long Island for Justice, and various NAACP branches throughout Nassau County made up a prominent number of those who gathered outside the county building.

“This police contract is not considering needed reforms to the police,” Shanequa Levin of Long Island United to Transform Policing & Community Safety said. “They need to hear us because they don’t care. We need them to know that Black lives matter to us.”

On Nov. 23, the County Legislature approved a new labor deal with the 350-member Superior Officers Association, the county's largest police union. The tentative deal is for eight-and-a-half years and awards pay raises totaling 15 percent and providing officers with a \$3,000 stipend upon their completion of the county's body camera program, expected to begin by September.

Levin said that the body camera initiative was not a satisfactory resolution to the need for effective police reforms.

"There should be real, structural changes [to the police], and I'm not just talking about damn body cameras where they're going to get a stipend to wear them," Levin said. "I'm talking about real change, like how ticketing can be handled differently, how we handle mental health cases differently, how we handle drug cases differently, I'm talking about reducing the footprint of the police in our streets."

Fred Brewington, a Hempstead-based civil rights attorney, said it is time to take the message of police reform "from the streets to the suites."

"If we don't rise up, our ancestors will roll over," Brewington said. "When we say 'Black Lives Matter,' we're talking about a historical statement that needs to be said. We're talking about a reason that Black people have been subjugated for 400 years when they came over in the bottom of slave ships."

Protesters also said the contract does not provide sufficient indications of needed reform as highlighted in Gov. Andrew Cuomo's executive order signed in mid-June. The order requires each police agency to conduct a plan to "reinvent and modernize police strategies" by April 1, when the state's next fiscal year begins.

The union membership is required to vote on the pact before it is sent for approval to the County Legislature and the county's fiscal control board.

Efforts to reach a representative of the Nassau Police Benevolent Association for comment were unavailing.

Nassau County spokesperson Michael Fricchione released a statement touting the safety of Nassau County as identified in a U.S. News & World Report poll this year.

"Nassau County is a national leader in both public safety and police reform," Fricchione said, "having convened more than 50 public meetings so far this year on strengthening police accountability, transparency and maintaining the County's status as the safest community in America."

Richard Nicoletto (R-New Hyde Park), presiding officer of the County Legislature, said the Republican majority will keep the residents' best interests while considering the contract.

"The Majority will thoroughly review the PBA contract once it is ratified by the union's membership, and submitted to the Legislature," Nicoletto said. "Our determination will be

based on what is in the best interests of Nassau’s taxpayers and residents as well as maintaining Nassau County as one of the safest places to live in the United States.”

William Biamonte, chief of staff to the County Legislature’s Democratic minority caucus, said the group supports police reform.

“It is our duty to hear the public’s voice as we seek to produce a comprehensive, community-driven plan that meets the diverse needs of Nassau County residents while ensuring officers are optimally and appropriately equipped to uphold the highest standards of professionalism as they serve and protect the public,” Biamonte said.

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