

LONG ISLAND

Calls for independent bodies to look into police misconduct at George Floyd rallies



Marches and rallies were held in Wyandanch and outside Roosevelt Field mall in Garden City on Saturday, to commemorate Tuesday's anniversary of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Credit: Howard Simmons; John Roca

By David Olson and Jean-Paul Salamanca

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Rallies and marches in Garden City and Wyandanch on Saturday commemorated Tuesday's anniversary of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and assailed Nassau and Suffolk counties' police reform plans as not holding police accountable for misconduct and abuse.

"As we approach the 25th, we've got to remind people that a human life was taken with no particular need and no justification," Frederick K. Brewington, a civil rights lawyer and member of Long Island Advocates for Police Accountability, said before the rally near Roosevelt Field in Garden City. "And we need to change policing in Nassau County, in Suffolk County and across America so we don't experience that again."

George Floyd died May 25, 2020, when Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes. Chauvin was convicted in April of murder and manslaughter.

Last June, in the wake of Floyd's murder, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo required municipalities to submit police reform plans to the state by April 1.

Shanequa Levin, a convener for LI United, said in a speech in Wyandanch that Suffolk's reform plan "failed when it came to accountability."

"They are given a pass, they can come and beat us, and profile us, and pull us over, and come into our homes, they can come and march in front of us and tell us what they can and cannot do, and they are constantly given a pass," Levin said, later adding, "When did their lives matter more than our lives?"

Afterward, about 40 people marched several miles through Wyandanch and West Babylon chanting slogans such as "Black Lives Matter!" and "No Justice, No Peace!"

Suffolk County police declined to comment Saturday.

Suffolk's police reform plan would give officers more training in de-escalation and would authorize the county's Human Rights Commission to create a

civilian bureau to investigate incidents in which officers use force.

Elmer Flores, one of the Wyandanch event's organizers, said the message of demonstrators was, "Look, our communities need police reform plans that are going to be accountable to the communities of color that need that trust, that need that representation, and that need that protection."

After the rally in Garden City, more than 60 people got down on one knee, raised their fists and observed a moment of silence for Floyd before a brief march in the unseasonable heat along the typically traffic-clogged Old Country Road.

Marchers commemorate the anniversary of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis at a rally in Wyandanch on Saturday. Credit: John Roca

Brewington said he wished County Executive Laura Curran and Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder were at the demonstration because "when they want to have discussions, they go



talk to themselves. They don't talk to us."

Brewington and other members of a county community advisory panel on police reform resigned in January after they said county and police officials ignored their input into what was then a draft police reform plan. The police plan was formally submitted to the

state April 1.

County spokesman Michael Fricchione said in a statement there had been "hundreds of meetings and countless hours of input from community stakeholders," that "the plan contains robust oversight," and "the Nassau Police Reform Plan passed the legislature in a bi-partisan manner."

The plan, which the county Legislature approved 16-3, with its three Black legislators voting against it, doesn't contain what rally participants say is critical: Independent bodies to investigate police misconduct.

New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a letter last month that the Nassau plan failed "to create meaningful checks on law enforcement."

Rally participant Dennis Jones, 59, of Valley Stream, said an independent Civilian Complaint Review Board and an office of police inspector general were needed because "it's very difficult for police to discipline themselves."

Jones is a retired NYPD detective who, he said, has seen from the inside how officers don't want to reveal or discuss colleagues' misconduct.

"That officer is going to be deemed a rat," he said. "He's going to be ostracized. No one's ever going to want to work with him again, or her."

Brewington called on Cuomo to reject the Nassau plan and withhold state funding for the Nassau police department until true reforms were made.

But officials with the governor's office said in an email Saturday that, under the June executive order, Cuomo does not approve plans; that is up to each jurisdiction, such as Nassau County.

"The process was designed to give local officials and stakeholders flexibility to develop and publicly approve a plan that best meets their community's needs," the governor's office said.

Speakers at both rallies said the pressure on the counties and their police departments would continue.

"We will chant louder, we will march longer, we will rally bigger," Terryl Dozier, a steering committee member of Long Island United to Transform Policing and Community Safety, said in Garden City. "We will be the face they will see in every legislature hearing. We will be the unwanted questions they get during the candidate forums."



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