

Goal: reinventing policing on LI

Competing plans in Nassau County show 2 methods



THE COLUMN
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Two proposals. Two different routes.

All heading toward the same destination: reviewing and reforming police practices in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

Last week, Nassau County Executive Laura Curran's administration submitted a 395-page reform proposal to the Nassau County Legislature.

A few days later, a coalition of activists, teachers, lawyers and others countered by releasing its own 310-page proposal, "The People's Plan."

That plan will go both to Nassau lawmakers and to a Suffolk coalition of elected officials and others that is crafting the county's state-mandated review.

A reading of both proposals — a total 705 pages of exposition and exhibits — makes two things clear:

Curran's administration pretty much looked at the issue from the inside out.

The People's Plan, as the name suggests, tackled the subject by viewing reform from the outside in.

Put another way, the Curran proposal builds on what exists.

The People's Plan puts forth a vision of what could be.

Both plans acknowledge the influence of worldwide protests following the death of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis last May.

"Recent events which have led to unrest in our country have made it clear that law enforcement, community members, and elected officials must work together to build mutual trust and respect . . ." the county proposal states.

The People's Plan puts it more directly.

"The murder of George Floyd and it being brought into every household, every handheld device and every platform in the world has been the flash point for what many refused to



Nassau police try to stop a man from arguing with a group of Long Island residents who came together to protest against police brutality at Delco Plaza in Hicksville on June 12.

acknowledge, or at least refused to respond to, until now," the document reads.

"The People's Plan is a thoughtful and necessary response and is part of a movement which has the ability to bring about monumental change . . ."

Curran's policing plan includes multiple initiatives, spelled out in detail, that have been part of department operations for years.

The proposal — which would have to be approved by county lawmakers and signed by Curran before going to Albany for review by the administration of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo — does include changes based on community suggestions.

Among them, is this:

"The community recommended to add questions on department employment applications to determine racial bias or implicit bias. The NCPD accepted this suggestion and added two questions . . . : Is there any race, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or physical appearance that you consider inferior to you? Do you believe that racial profiling by law enforcement is a useful tool?"

The People's Plan takes a different approach to getting at attitudes of prospective depart-

ment hires. It recommends a review of factors including history of use of force, loss of policing certification and a search of social media history.

Once officers are hired, " . . . the Nassau and Suffolk Police Departments should adopt social media policies that prohibit communication that create the appearance of bias or hatred among those tasked with upholding and enforcing the laws and keeping peace," the plan states.

Much of The People's Plan consists of discussion of initiatives used in other parts of the nation — programs and policies that would be new to the Nassau and Suffolk police departments, which are two of the largest in the nation.

One recommendation: a Civilian Review Board, similar to New York City's, that would review of complaints against police officers.

In Nassau, creation of such a board likely would require approval by the county's police unions, since the department's disciplinary procedures are spelled out in contracts with the county.

Last week, the county and its largest police union, the Police Benevolent Association, sat down to continue negotiations after an earlier agreement — which would have paid officers

\$3,000 each to wear body cameras — was rejected by union members.

Civilian review has never part of any Nassau police contract.

Both Nassau police reform plans deal with the handling of civilian complaints.

The county's proposal notes that the police department already plans to issue reports on civilian complaints twice a year.

"This report will include the number of complaints and allegations broken down by the nature of the complaint and the gender and race of the complainant, when provided," the county plan says. "The details of founded findings will be included in the unlawful conduct category."

The People's Plan wants significantly more than that, including legislative review, hearings and periodic reports to county legislators.

Both plans seek closer ties between communities and police.

Curran's plan notes that, per recommendations from the community, the police department will expand its PAL program, and will assign officers on bicycles to patrol in Roosevelt.

The People's Plan says: "When serious incidents occur in the present, including those

involving alleged police misconduct, all Police Departments should communicate with citizens and the media swiftly, openly, and neutrally, respecting areas where the law requires confidentiality."

Such "direct and transparent communication will go a long way toward increasing community members' ability to trust that the police department prioritizes the safety and well-being of the community, rather than perpetuating the harmful 'Blue Wall of Silence.'"

Both plans address traffic stops.

"None of these situations are ever initiated based on race, gender, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, religion, or financial status," the county plan states. (A Newsday analysis of partial county data, meanwhile, showed that Black drivers were more likely to be pulled over than whites, given their percentages of the population.)

And both reform plans deal with de-escalation techniques. The county's proposal includes a list of procedures police officers are supposed to follow; The People's Plan recommends using personnel other than police officers to deal with calls involving mental health and other such issues.

Both plans spend pages on data collection, and — perhaps most important — on the need for openness and transparency. (Last week, Newsday filed suit against Nassau's police department to release police disciplinary records.)

So, what happens now?

In Nassau, the police plan is before the county legislature, which is expected to hear testimony on police reform on Wednesday.

In Suffolk County, the sausage making of police review and reform goes on — because the administration of County Executive Steve Bellone has yet to submit a formal plan to county lawmakers.

Cuomo's mandate was that review and reform include community input. The issue became so contentious in Nassau that more than a dozen members resigned from a community advisory committee tasked with the job.

Many of those members went on to draft The People's Plan.