

Police reform plan lets communities down

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Nassau County plan has little oversight and is difficult to monitor and enforce

BY FREDERICK BREWINGTON AND SHANEQUA LEVIN

Since the murder of George Floyd last year, we have all traveled a long, hard journey, with hopes for change in Nassau County. Thousands of people peacefully protested for months, to address racism in policing — but we were hopeful. Nassau County Executive Laura Curran and Nassau County Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder took a knee in solidarity and proclaimed Black Lives Matter — and we were hopeful.

We read Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's executive order — and we were hopeful. We were invited onto task forces — and we were hopeful. And that was the last time we were hopeful.

Since the formation of the Nassau County police reform task forces, we have repeatedly witnessed disrespect and a stunning level of ignorance concerning the experiences of Black and brown communities. Last Monday was the final straw, as we watched the legislative committees adopt Curran's police re-

form plan. It is superficial, has no transformative vision, and makes a clear statement that trust is a thing to be deserved, not earned.

This plan raises two questions: Why is the Nassau County Police Department so afraid to submit itself to oversight? And does real reform really matter to the county executive?

Most of the plan rests on internal department policy — not legislation. This means it is purely voluntary, difficult to monitor and enforce, and places the onus on the public to obtain information.

It contains very little oversight. There is no Civilian Complaint Review Board or police inspector general's office, leaving the police to continue policing themselves. The police commissioner cited the attorney general's investigative powers as sufficient oversight, but that must be actively pursued by the public and is difficult to obtain. Notably, the police commissioner has expressed personal dismay at the very suggestion that over-



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Demonstrators rally and march in Baldwin on July 23, 2020 to protest the death of George Floyd and others at the hands of police.

sight might be required.

Further, the county's plan relies exclusively on body cameras as a panacea for transparency. But that is not the same thing as oversight, and, again, requires the public to pursue the footage.

The Right to Know Act, which would have required officers to share the reason for a stop in writing, was also rejected. The police commissioner dismissed it, saying that

officers' names and badge numbers are already visible, and that officers always tell people why they are being stopped. Affected communities would tell you otherwise. He also said that the department does not engage in pretextual stops — in which police make stops for innocuous issues like broken taillights as a pretext for further investigation — saying he's never seen paperwork describing a stop as pretextual.

While the plan includes sev-

eral areas of data collection to be posted on the department's website and reported biannually, it's missing information, including unfounded or unsubstantiated complaints and language access. It is also not mandated by law.

The plan does include retraining of 911 operators to divert mental health calls to the mobile crisis unit. However, despite the national, data-driven trends to remove police from these encounters, Ryder insists police remain present at all immediate, emergency calls, including non-criminal and nonviolent events.

Unless Curran amends her plan to reflect real reforms, the message will be crystal clear: Nassau County believes that trust is not something to be earned — it is simply deserved.

We were hopeful. We are no longer. Does real reform really matter to the county executive? Does it matter to her constituents?

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