

Why disparity in use of force? What role do the mental health people play?

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police August 13, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

[Public Safety Committee meeting video here](#)

Councilwoman Crampsie Smith began discussion after the presentation by the police that you can find in the previous post in this series.

She asked two very good questions: why is force used so much more against POC, and what about working with mental health people?

Why the disparity in the use of force?

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Chief DiLuzio reminded us that resistance by the subject is what triggers use of force, that the department is diverse, that officers are part of the community, that, sure, there are some racist cops, but racism is in every profession, that force depends on the volume of calls and the neighborhood, and that the answer to Councilwoman Crampsie Smith's question therefore is not a pleasant one — that there is no one direct answer, that there is not one reason why. “More police interaction in an area leads to more use of force,” he said.

Capt Kott jumped in to say that you can't wear blinders and act as if implicit bias doesn't exist. Sounding very much like the new PhD in Criminal Justice that she is, Capt Kott said that training can't end with an ethics course in the academy, and she launched into the need for training in implicit bias, cultural diversity, procedural justice, and Trauma-informed interviewing. Wow! Such terms! She said that they were holding the department to a higher standard than other departments in these areas.



What about the role of mental health people?

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GCS picked up on the stat that force is used in a high number of cases to protect the subject from himself/herself, who is very often in trouble because of drugs, alcohol, and the like, and she wanted to know about working with mental health people — how often are you working with county crisis intervention, for instance? The Chief’s view was negative, they are not much involved, don’t do night work, etc. How can Council help you, GCS asked, have them out there 24/7, the Chief answered. Deputy Meixell filled in more about the reality when a person needs to be controlled and about follow-up care police are involved in. GCS ends with a hope that Council can provide more resources.

These were interesting conversations, and Gadfly would note a couple things:

- department diversity: The Chief mentioned this, I think, to deflect the idea that we are a “white” department. Gadfly sees improvement over time, of course, but, though he doesn’t know what the magic mix numbers are, he thinks it is doubtful that these statistics negate characterizing the department as “white.”

SEX, RACE & ETHNICITY

2014 (149 Officers)

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Middle Eastern	Other
Male	132	4	5	1	1	0
Female	6	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	138	4	5	1	1	0

2020 (154 Officers)

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Middle Eastern	Other
Male	125	5	12	0	2	0
Female	9	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	134	5	12	1	2	0

CITY ETHNICITY

White – 78.7 % (Hispanic -28.5%)
Black – 7%
Asian – 2.9%
Other – 5.8%

- Councilman Reynolds and others spoke at last meeting of the need for the police department “looking like” the racial make-up of the City. Gadfly doesn’t feel the numbers show we are close to that.
- Officers as part of the community: Ummm, there was a bit of static about this from commenters. Once upon a time officers were required to live in Bethlehem, not so now. The idea has been floated here and also during the meeting of bringing that requirement back. Once again, Gadfly says it would be interesting to know how many of the 154 officers do live in Bethlehem,
- Gadfly’s glad he didn’t get asked why force is used more on POC than whites and has some sympathy for the Chief, but his answer certainly created some static among commenters.
- Capt Kott is some training guru, but several Council members tried to get an answer to how much training everybody got. There was no clear answer. And the idea that some training is done in a 10-15 minute stretch at Roll Call, as we learned later, frankly, seemed laughable. We need to know more about how training is done.
- Gadfly would like to think more about and hear more discussion about this one: “resistance by the subject is what triggers use of force.” The Chief used this as a kind of “end of argument” statement. Force is not the “fault” of the officer. Blame the subject? I dunno, feels a little too pat for Gadfly. Anybody on the same page?
- The “defunders” want more mental health involvement. They suggest often funding it from the police budget. GCS wants more mental health involvement but has said she won’t “defund.” She’s talked of getting grants, but it’s not a good idea to plan on being able to depend on grants. At some point, if you want to do something, it will have to come out of the budget.