

Bethlehem Police to participate in implicit bias training

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [George Floyd killing](#) April 9, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

“At the end of the day, we all have a common goal, and that is to make sure everyone gets home safely,”

selections from [Tom Shortell](#), *“New Northampton County training program will help police officers recognize and address implicit bias.” Morning Call, April 6, 2021.*

While a Minnesota courtroom heard testimony Tuesday morning in former police officer Derek Chauvin’s trial in the death of George Floyd, Northampton County officials unveiled an implicit bias training program for local police departments they hope can help prevent similar tragedies.

The training, which is becoming more common in corporate America as well as in law enforcement, is intended to make people aware of the unconscious, learned stereotypes that inform their behaviors and thinking. For police responding to sometimes tense situations, these biases can carry drastic consequences.

“I think everyone can benefit from this kind of training, and we want to fund it because we have the money and we know municipal budgets are stretched,” County Executive Lamont McClure said while announcing the \$20,000 program.

The county already provides the training to corrections officers at the Northampton County Jail through consultant Guillermo Lopez of Intersekt Alliance. Lopez will now lead 20 three-hour sessions with up to 20 police officers at each. Northampton County Director of Human Services Susan Wandalowski said police chiefs at the Bethlehem,

Bethlehem Township, Colonial Regional, Nazareth and Palmer Township departments expressed interest in the program.

The county normally has no direct role in police training, but is making money available through its Human Services Department, which typically handles social work. McClure and Wandalowski said they felt it was an appropriate use of the money, comparing it with the crisis intervention training it already offers local police to emphasize de-escalation techniques. “At the end of the day, we all have a common goal, and that is to make sure everyone gets home safely,” Wandalowski said.

Lopez, who has offered similar training sessions to police in Easton, Bethlehem and Allentown over the past decade, said the training tasks officers with considering how they perceive the people they serve, how those people see them and how differences in those perceptions arise in diverse communities. Police are already drilled on how to protect themselves, but sometimes more training is needed to identify actual threats from perceived threats.

“We work to help them understand there is a difference between being unsafe and being uncomfortable,” Lopez said.

In an interview Tuesday, Bethlehem police Chief Michelle Kott said she will require her officers to attend the training. The department had Lopez’s training 13 years ago with periodic refreshers from the Municipal Police Officers Education and Training Commission since then. But communities across the country, including Bethlehem, have demanded police show more empathy and awareness since Floyd died after Chauvin kneeled on his neck for more than 9 minutes last summer.

“I just don’t feel it was given the attention it deserved in the past across the board,” Kott said. “That’s something that on a year-to-year basis can be hampered by training budgets, be hampered by the availability of officers. We’re incredibly grateful the county is investing in the training.”

Bravo, Chief Kott!