

# Listening summit: building relationships key; defunding police not the answer locally

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [George Floyd killing](#) August 26, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

*from Sarah M. Wojcik, “Dialogue on race and policing continues in Northampton County, but both sides seem to agree on one thing: defunding police is not the answer.” Morning Call, August 25, 2020.*

David Collins, a captain with the Department of Corrections at the Northampton County Jail. . . . doesn’t think police departments need less money, but he also believes in the power of peaceful protesting and the message of the Black Lives Matter movement.

“If I’m doing my job, I get it from both sides,” Collins told a roomful of police leadership and Black community members Tuesday morning at the ArtsQuest Center in Bethlehem. “I don’t believe in the movement to defund police. I think it’s ridiculous. But I also believe in Black Lives Matter. How can I not? After I take this uniform off, people don’t see a blue life. They see a Black life.”

Collins shared his experience during the second installment of a listening summit designed to open a dialogue between Northampton County law enforcement and Black leaders in the community.

The aim of the summits — the first of which was in June — has been the sharing of ideas, experiences and concerns, in order to try to improve the relationship between police and communities of color.

Andre Stevens, a detective and task force coordinator with the Northampton County Drug Task Force, said he was dismayed to see the video, both as a member of law enforcement and a Black man. He said he was most bothered that officers, close enough to Blake to tug on his shirt, chose deadly force over other methods of detaining the man.

“Police are not punching bags. We want to go home safely to our families,” said Stevens. “That being said, if you got fear in your heart, you shouldn’t wear the badge. Because it’s fear that will escalate a situation far beyond where it should.”

But a lot of the confrontations between police and the public are not clear cut, argued Bethlehem police Chief Mark DiLuzio. He mentioned the July 12 incident in Allentown, when a city officer restrained Edward Borrero Jr., 37, in front of the St. Luke’s Hospital-Sacred Heart, and used a knee to keep Borrero’s head pinned to the ground.

Photos and video of the encounter caught national attention and sparked local protests. But Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin ultimately determined the officer’s use of force was “reasonable.”

“Use of force does not look pretty,” DiLuzio said. “It’s messy and it’s nasty. It never looks like it does on TV. And that’s why we need to wait and see what the facts are before we go out and make things worse.”

Police and community members agreed that building relationships would be key to changing tensions between law enforcement and communities of color.

But Tuesday’s attendees agreed that the rallying cry to defund the police was not the answer locally.

Houck said he greatly opposed the idea, saying he’s seen police departments slowly “defunded” over the years as budgets have been slashed.

“It would cripple prosecutions and investigations if it were to continue,” Houck said of funding reductions.

Myers also took issue with a literal interpretation of “defund the police.” What he believes most people want to see is a reallocation of police funding.

This would mean beefing up training or moving some of the duties to different professionals such as social workers, rather than shelling out money for militarized equipment, Myers said.

Nicole Cooper, an Easton resident who has helped organize Black Lives Matter events in the city, agreed that “defunding” can be a misnomer that hurts the cause itself. But while reallocation is more accurate, she said that term doesn’t capture the full breadth of the reform advocates want. Funding changes should also include an element of oversight and accountability, she said, ensuring that departments put the money where it’s most needed in their community, whether it be for outreach or training.