

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
COORDINATING COUNCIL**

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
WEBINAR  
SERIES:  
Session  
Two**

**POLICING IN THE  
DISTRICT - WHAT  
WILL BE THE  
NEW NORMAL?**

May 27, 2021

1:00 - 3:00 PM

VIRTUAL EVENT

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PLEASE REGISTER AT: [CJWS2.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://cjws2.eventbrite.com)



## Background

On May 27, 2021, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) convened the second session of its Criminal Justice Webinar Series. The session was called “Policing in the District – What Will Be the New Normal?”

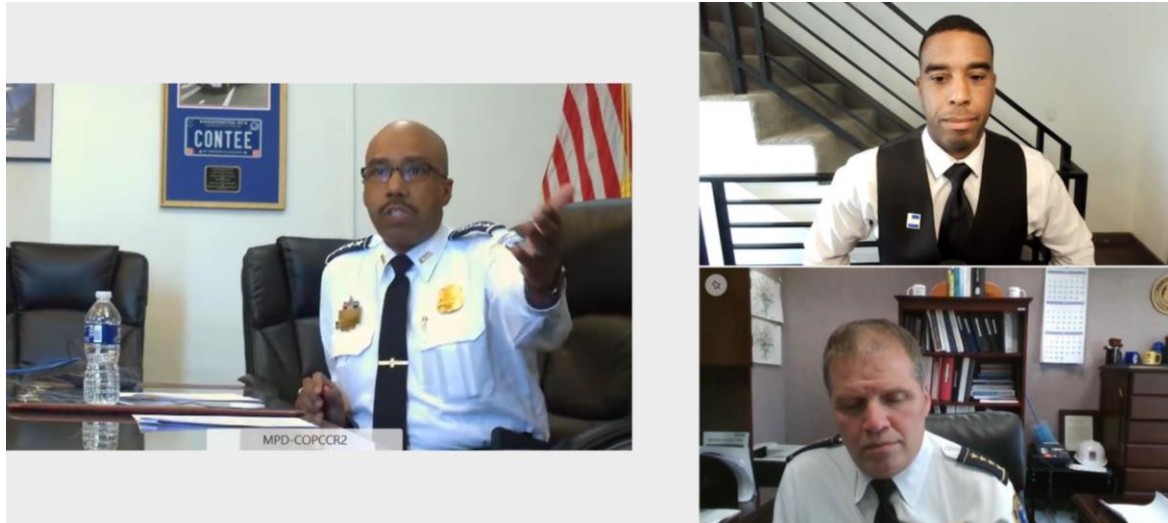
Across the nation and specifically in the District of Columbia, the unwarranted killing of African Americans by police officers has sparked social protests and calls for police reform and social justice. In response, state and local legislatures, including the DC Council, developed legislation to transform the policing landscape and reallocate funding to support community-driven public safety initiatives. In the District, the D.C. Police Reform Commission issued its final report in April 2021,<sup>1</sup> which includes recommendations for reforming policing in the District and rethinking the city’s approach to ensuring public safety. Appreciating the changing landscape and expectations for policing in the District, CJCC assembled a panel—including the chiefs of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD), in addition to a national expert on police/civilian dynamics, and two community representatives—to share their perspectives on the state of policing in the District.

CJCC Executive Director Mannone Butler commenced the virtual discussion, welcomed the webinar attendees, moderator, and panelists to the program, and highlighted the importance of this convening. She expressed a goal to obtain a clear understanding of what must occur to realize enhanced public safety, transformed policing, and concrete steps to improve civilian/police relations. Director Butler proceeded to introduce Mr. Sean Sheppard, Founder and CEO, Game Changer.

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<sup>1</sup> [D.C. Police Reform Commission - Home \(dcpolicereform.com\)](https://dcpolicereform.com)

## National Policing Landscape Overview



Sean Sheppard, President and CEO of Game Changer, set the stage for the discussion by sharing a national perspective on policing, police-civilian relations, and his work convening focus group discussions designed to glean and change negative perceptions between police and civilians. He shared that his organization works extensively with police associations, elected officials, and communities. The cornerstone of Mr. Sheppard's work focuses on promoting positive and honest dialogue reinforced with social outings shared among civilians and police. According to Mr. Sheppard, Game Changer is transforming the behavioral landscape and perceptions of police and civilians

He explained that the focus groups discussions employ an experiential learning model rooted in behavioral psychology, which is designed to bring about changes in perception, which in turn leads to changes in outcomes, i.e. peaceful outcomes between citizens and police. The focus groups include pre/post-focus discussions between law enforcement officers and civilians. A central component of the process includes at least one social event where attendees can interact personally. Preceding the social events, participants engage in a three- hour discussion designed to identify problem areas and identify solutions.

Sean shared the following information regarding the focus groups he convenes:

- The general public's perception of law enforcement became more positive after the event.
  - 64% of civilians viewed law enforcement as more beneficial to the community;
  - 71% of civilian participants indicated that they had a more positive view of law enforcement.;
  - 68% of law enforcement indicated that they had a better understanding of community members of color.

## Panel Discussion

The moderator, Ms. Charisma Howell, Director, Georgetown Street Law at Georgetown University Law Center introduced the following panelists:



- Robert Contee, Chief, Metropolitan Police Department
- Ashan Benedict, Assistant Chief, Metropolitan Police Department
- Ronald Pavlik, Chief, Metro Transit Police Department
- Brenda Richardson, President, Chozen Consulting, LLC
- Jawanna Hardy, Activist, Guns Down Friday
- Sean Sheppard, Founder & CEO, Game Changer

Ms. Howell commenced the discussion by posing a series of questions.

*Policing Overview – “Do We Have the Type of Policing We Want? What Needs to Be Improved, And What’s Working Well?”*

Assistant Chief Ashan Benedict (MPD) commented that MPD is actively providing training to officers in crisis intervention, 25% of whom are trained as crisis intervention officers. He expressed that the most important goal is to train officers to intervene with each other on use of force matters. As part of that goal, MPD employs the Active Bystander for Law Enforcement (ABLE) training whereby officers can intervene in the actions of their colleagues before use of force escalates. Further, MPD is working with the mayor’s office and mental health professionals to incorporate strategies that highlight non-police interventions on crisis calls. Officers also have the opportunity to seek counseling through the Blue Courage program if they experience anxiety or trauma resulting from their work. Finally, Chief Benedict highlighted the creation of the Youth and Family Engagement Bureau designed to work with families and children and strengthen MPD’s community engagement.

Ms. Richardson offered that she looks forward to the day when families do not have to have “the



talk” with their children regarding how to engage with police. Further, she emphasized the importance of police employing de-escalation techniques, which she indicated she has witnessed MPD employ, and she cited MPD’s work with the community to help ensure COVID-19 safety protocols (social distancing) were adhered to during pop-

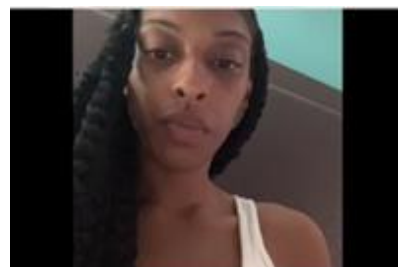
up events, i.e., spontaneous block parties.

Chief Pavlik stressed that his department’s efforts, like MPD, also include ABLE and Blue Courage training. Further, his department operates under a compact with Congress that requires his

officers to receive training that meets or exceeds the training of surrounding jurisdictions. MTPD embraces the principals and pillars identified by the President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, which requires greater agency accountability.<sup>2</sup>

Upon joining the discussion, Chief Contee hailed the diversity in hiring that MPD is experiencing, including the hiring of more women, individuals from east of the river, and enhanced hiring from the MPD Cadet Program.

Ms. Howell probed Chief Pavlik regarding any policy changes MTPD has underway, considering that schools will be reopening in the fall and that Metro serves as “the nation’s capital school bus.” The Chief highlighted the creation of the Internal Oversight and Youth Services Bureau with a unit focused on young riders, intended to engage them and emphasize the importance of adhering to Metro safety



protocols to protect traveling youth and other Metro users. Chief Pavlik commented that the existence of an electrified third rail and oncoming trains present inherent dangers, which are magnified when youth engage in horse-play and rough housing. The Chief emphasized his officers have a responsibility to protect youth from themselves. Members of the Youth Services Bureau wear non-tactical uniforms to appear less intimidating. MTPD is also collaborating with the Deputy Mayor for Education and the Chancellor on programs that emphasize safety as opposed to law enforcement. Lastly, MTPD endeavors to monitor intelligence in collaboration with MPD and participate in daily conference calls to mitigate the potential for violent activities that start on Metro and spillover into neighborhoods when youth depart Metro.

#### Stop Data

Per the NEAR Act, MPD is required to collect and publicly report data on “stop and frisks” conducted by officers. MPD released the “[Stop Data Summary](#)” for January to June 2020, which revealed that 75% of all persons stopped by MPD in the first half of 2020 were Black, whereas (as of July 2018) Blacks made up only 46.4% of the District’s population. Ms. Howell asked what the Summary reveals about policing, and potential bias the data may show regarding Black males.

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<sup>2</sup> [Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing | Office of Justice Programs \(ojp.gov\)](#)



Chief Contee offered that the statistics do not necessarily reflect any bias, although he acknowledged that everyone, including police, suffer from bias. Further, in the performance of their duties, police exercise professional discretion as necessary when making stops, such as to enforce traffic laws and reduce fatalities. The Chief also offered that stop are conducted in response to residents' requests that police be on the lookout (BOLO) for specific persons accused of

crimes, and in turn MPD responds accordingly.

#### Accountability and Funding

With respect to police accountability, Chief Contee stated that the Office of Police Complaints processes cases of alleged police misconduct. He also cited the use of body worn cameras to provide greater transparency of police actions.

Defunding and reallocating funding for policing was addressed during the discussion. The panelists concurred that defunding the police was a non-starter and deemed a misnomer. Chiefs Contee and Pavlik acknowledged the critical responsibilities of their departments and related challenges. Each of them cited the value of providing funding for training and identifying alternative crisis intervention strategies to respond to persons experiencing mental health crises. Neither Chief embraced the proposed defunding strategy. Specifically, Chief Contee offered that the first thing people do when a situation arises is call for police intervention. He acknowledged that other skillsets could be brought to bear as situations warrant, i.e., using a crisis behavioral professional. The Chief noted, however, that you cannot allow criminal behavior to occur unaddressed.

Sean Sheppard offered that demands by individuals to defund the police are confusing. Calling for "defunding" is sometimes unclear (i.e., zeroing out the police department's budget versus decreasing the budget or reallocating resources). He offered that a better alternative is exploring the reallocation of resources and applying them to emerging needs, i.e., mental health, trauma-informed services, etc. Mr. Sheppard also highlighted that police departments need to be held accountable, and each officer must be willing to speak up when they see other officers violating the rights of civilians.

Chief Pavlik commented that calls to defund the police would make the efforts to recruit and retain staff more difficult. Chief Contee stressed that the community must determine what it

wants its police department and officers to do; because when you call the police, they expect to do their job, but must know what those responsibilities include.

Brenda Richardson provided context on police accountability and commented that it is important to look at the data and determine if there is selective enforcement of laws in certain Wards. Conversely, she offered that perhaps citations can be issued for certain infractions as opposed to resorting to arrests.

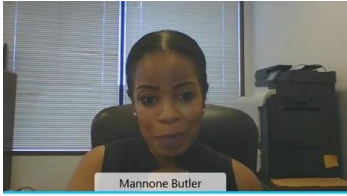
#### Policing Strategies and Prospects, Question and Answers

Executive Director Butler inquired regarding the many functions police departments execute and asked for an elaboration on the challenges they present particularly regarding calls for reform that exceed protecting and serving and include responding to crisis intervention calls, i.e., persons experiencing a mental health crisis. Chief Contee indicated his department recognizes there are opportunities to reset priorities and responses, and there is a corresponding need to identify who and what entity assumes the redefined responsibilities. Chief Pavlik concurred with Chief Contee's remarks and highlighted the importance of the public understanding what the new priorities and expectations are of police departments and what corresponding levels of training is required for officers to fulfill their duties.

Further Director Butler asked a "magic wand" question regarding what the new normal of policing should look like. Chief Contee referred to Sean Sheppard's earlier comments and cited the importance of listening to marginalized communities and voices that are being drowned out by other voices with bigger megaphones and access to computers and the internet. The Chief emphasized it is paramount for the community to define what it wants regarding policing. Further, the Chief offered that it is vital to engage and listen to people and communities impacted by violence.

Director Butler invited the Chiefs to describe what this process could look like. Responses included meeting people where they are experientially and emotionally, reducing conflicts on public transportation that spill over into neighborhoods, not employing a "one size fits all" strategy, and deploying mental health professionals on the streets in hot spots.

Sean Sheppard stressed the importance of changing community and individual perceptions, while proposing that a very small minority (5%) of police might be "bad actors" and similarly only 5% of civilians engage in criminal behavior; yet we focus our attention on the 5% (on both sides) as opposed to the 95% who are trying to do the right thing. Chief Contee concurred and said people are encouraged to say something if they see something. This comes with a corresponding responsibility on the government to ensure bad actors are not immediately released back to the streets to continue their illegal behavior. He lamented that community members tell their children not to talk to police, thereby creating mistrust and non-cooperation. The Chief concluded that perhaps people are not truly ready to engage in honest dialogue.



Director Butler inquired further regarding Chief Contee’s vision of policing. He shared that his priority is law enforcement, including apprehending the right offenders, removing illegal guns from the streets, deploying mental health diversion teams, and employing innovation in law enforcement. Chief Pavlik

suggested broadening community engagement as a priority. Chief Contee highlighted the creation of the Youth and Family Engagement Bureau to respond to the needs of families. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of appreciating the humanity of MPD officers, and the fact that they experience stress in the performance of their duties and rely on receiving mental health support to navigate the traumas they witness and respond to daily.

In closing Ms. Butler thanked the panelists, the moderator, and the webinar attendees and noted the importance of leveraging discussions such as the one that occurred during this webinar for meaningful and effective change in policing and public safety.