Every time Fairfax County officials issue a response[1] to unarmed citizens dying at the hands of police, they go out of their way to commend the department and its relationship with the community. While it may be true that most people feel safe and protected by police in Fairfax County, there are more added to those who feel the reverse every time there is another incident like the one that inspired this commission.

It doesn't help that both the police department and Fairfax County's elected and appointed officials appear more concerned with covering up for bad acts, bad policies, and bad cops than they are with addressing bad acts, bad policies, and bad cops.

The public help but get this impression when it sees officers involved in unjustified killings remaining uncharged[2] and on the job[3] time and time again, or when it reads about how the police department refuses to comply[4] with Virginia's requirement of reporting officer-involved shootings to the state police, or when it notices that previously-reported use of force statistics were omitted from the much-delayed 2012-2013 annual report.

Confidence is further eroded when one reads statements about how it is the department's policy not to release dashcam footage[5] and other pieces of information when there is a lawsuit or the possibility of one and when it routinely denies FOIA requests[6] on cases long since closed and beyond the scope of civil action. There's a clear conflict of interest when agencies charged with protecting the public, make it their highest priority to protect themselves instead. If wrongdoing has occurred, it is the agency's duty to be transparent about it and take corrective action.

In Supervisor Cook's 2015 constituent survey, only 51.7% of respondents reported having a great deal of confidence the police

officers in their community would not use excessive force. When asked "how confident are you that the police in this county are held accountable for any misconduct," only 35.74% said they were "very confident." A full 24.42% were either "not so confident" or "not confident at all."

To any of the law enforcement personnel in the room: If you are angrier at the people who feel that way than you are at the officers who commit the bad acts that inspire such sentiments, you are part of the problem.

To that end, I hope that the recruitment subcommittee will also be examining recruitment activities for the chief of police, and that as much public input will be sought for that process as there was for the new director of the public library system[7]. There have been too many incidents of unarmed citizens being wrongfully killed with too little action taken to prevent the next one from happening. It's time for new leadership in the police department. Leadership that will take a more proactive and responsive stance than battening down the hatches and waiting for things to "just blow over."

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[1] Fairfax County is the safest jurisdiction of its size due in no small part to the hard work and dedication of our public safety personnel. The Fairfax County Police Department, celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, has long served and protected our community, and through a model of community policing has built and maintained the public trust and confidence.
March 3, 2015 Board Matter - Establishment of the Ad Hoc Police Practices Review Commission (As Amended)
http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/chairman/pdf/board-matter-march3.pdf

[2] The Fairfax County police officer [Deval Bullock] who shot an unarmed man [Salvatore Culosi] to death in January [2006] will not be charged with a crime, the county's chief prosecutor announced this afternoon.
Officer Won't Face Charges in Shooting Death
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/23/AR2006032301117.html

[3] But "I don't understand what the delay is" in deciding whether or not to charge Torres, who remains on the police force, on administrative duty, while waiting for a ruling.
John Geer's family still reeling, waiting for decision 20 months after shooting
http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/05/01/john-geers-family-still-reeling-waiting-for-decision-20-months-after-shooting/

[4] And at least one police agency, Fairfax County police, has unilaterally stopped providing the data, saying they are not legally required to do so. The agency said such homicides are not considered to be an "actual offense" and therefore are not required to be included in an agency's crime-reporting numbers. None of the 13 justifiable homicides the department said involved its officers from 2007 through 2013 was reported to the state. Fairfax refused to provide numbers before 2007.
Untold number of police killings in Va. go unreported or uncounted
http://www.richmond.com/news/article_c656c2ba-b51a-5b91-b1c7-6b6cee89b336.html

[5] In a statement accompanying the release, Fairfax police Chief Edwin C. Roessler said: "Based on several requests, the video was provided to the Ad Hoc Police Practices Review Commission and is posted here. In reaching my decision to release the in-car video, I considered the following factors: the local criminal investigation has been completed; the U.S. Department of Justice criminal investigation has been completed; and there is no pending or threatened civil litigation."
Fairfax County police release video in 2009 officer involved shooting
http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/05/06/fairfax-county-police-release-dashboard-video-in-2009-david-masters-killing/

[6] Police officials in Fairfax (and also in Arlington and Alexandria) have adopted what they call a "blanket" approach to using their exemption. That means they have decided to withhold any document they can without any analysis of whether they should, whether the case is open or closed, whether they are about a "police-involved shooting" or information requested by a family about a homicide victim.
Editorial: On Police Information and Secrecy; Time for change in public access to police information
http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2015/mar/17/editorial-police-information-and-secrecy/

[7] A well-publicized survey invites residents to "Please help us find the best person to serve as our next library director by answering these questions."
Fairfax County Public Library New Director Survey
http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/directorsearch.htm