

**Ad Hoc Practices Review Commission
Communications Subcommittee**

June 8, 2015, 7:30 p.m.

Conference Room 7, Fairfax County Government Center

Subcommittee members present:

Merni Fitzgerald	Doug Kay
Darryl Drevna	Patrick Smaldore
Dave Statter	Brennan Murphy
Tom Ryan	Tony Castrilli
Eric Clingan	Lucy Caldwell
Daniela Cockayne	Tim Thompson
Mary Kimm John Wallace	

Ms. Fitzgerald called the meeting order and briefly previewed the agenda.

The Subcommittee approved the notes as drafted by Tom Ryan.

Ms. Fitzgerald introduced the first speaker, Julie Parker. She is the Public Information Officer (PIO) for the Prince Georges County Maryland Police Department (PGPD).

Presentation from Julie Parker

Ms. Parker explained her role at PGPD. She was previously a reporter before accepting employment with PGPD. Prior to taking the position, she observed that PGPD had a poor reputation in the media. She outlined the chronic cycle of poor press experienced there. She set out to change the culture and reputation at PGPD. Bringing out good news and hearing from the community were points of emphasis. She utilizes social media to reach the community quickly and efficiently.

Ms. Parker runs her department like a newsroom. She publishes stories like a reporter. She frequently teases stories to get the media interested.

Ms. Parker explained that, in order to transform PGPD's image, she had to build trust with the police. She experienced some push back from an old school culture that preferred to withhold information from the public. To succeed she needed support from the very top. The PGPD Chief was comfortable with releasing both good and bad news. With the support of the Chief, Ms. Parker's support then trickled down to the next level of command staff.

Ms. Parker encouraged all uniformed officers to think like reporters so that they could recognize and later report good deeds of the PGPD. The benefit of reporting good news is reflected by the fact that now the news cycles of even the most difficult stories typically lasts only one day. Very short news cycles for bad news is a good thing for the PGPD.

Ms. Parker emphasized the importance of telling as much as possible up front. Key information includes: 1) what happened, 2) what are you doing about the crisis now and 3) what are you doing to be sure it doesn't happen again?

Ms. Parker noted the importance of having the right person out front to explain a critical incident. She believes that the chief or a deputy chief should report critical incidents.

She described how her department handles a police involved shooting. She explained that when she receives a call or text that a police involved shooting has occurred, all the important personnel are summoned. From there, the early basic information is gathered. She noted that this information is typically reliable. Her department will tweet out information she is confident will not change. She puts a PIO on scene. She then meets with the on-scene PIO and commander so they can determine what they can report to the public. Typically, they report the time of incident, place of incident, what call went out and the number of officers involved. They explain that the investigation is on-going. Ms. Parker permits reporters to be as close as possible to the scene.

Information is typically released in three cycles: the initial report; a follow-up report later that day; and a final report the next day. When the media gets it wrong, she will inform the media of its error and request a correction.

Dave Statter commented on a shooting in College Park where the suspect was shot multiple times while on PCP. He emphasized that, because of its new-found improved reputation, the PGPD is viewed differently by the media and public. Mr. Statter described an impressive press release where an assistant chief used a white board to great effect.

Mr. Castrilli asked about the challenges of changing culture. Ms. Parker said that success is dependent on support from the chief and other high-level uniformed officers. Mr. Castrilli asked if she had the support of the county executive and others in civilian leadership. Ms. Parker said the civilian leadership supports her chief and has not interfered. She has found no need to seek support from civilian leadership.

Ms. Fitzgerald introduced Tony Castrilli, the PIO for Fairfax County.

Presentation from Tony Castrilli

Mr. Castrilli discussed several examples of how police departments from around the country have handled police involved shootings. He emphasized that reporting of critical police incidents requires a plan and many tools to implement the plan. He explained that police departments that withhold information from the public and appear disorganized will foment distrust of the community. He described other departments that have enjoyed good public relations are "radically transparent" in their approach to disclosure. He said that information gathered during investigations of police involved shootings is eventually subject to disclosure. He provided the examples of Philadelphia and Boston where a significant emphasis on transparency has led to praise.

Mr. Castrilli reviewed procedures in Tucson, Arizona. In Tucson, the department provides detailed reports within twenty-four hours of the incident and continues to provide briefings as the story unfolds. Officers involved are identified within five days of a shooting.

Mr. Castrilli contrasted departments that stress transparency with a recent incident in Arlington County, Virginia where the reporting came from the county not the police department. Most all details of the incident were withheld. Three weeks after the incident, the county released a brief report.

Mr. Castrilli played a video of a press conference from the Chief of the Omaha PD who received much praise from media and his community.

Mr. Castrilli discussed pros and cons of using civilian versus uniformed PIOs. Advantages included less turnover and increased experience. Alexandria City and Arlington County employ a civilian PIO commander. Mr. Castrilli discussed the advantages of "Open Data." He explained that sharing government data will improve public trust.

Mr. Castrilli published a list of best practices in his slide show:

- Provide accurate, timely and actionable information.
- Use redundant forms of communication.
- Communicate both good and bad news.
- Use multiple communication tools – both traditional media as well as social media.
- Get "buy-in" and cooperation from all levels of the Department to be transparent.
- Commit to not withholding information.
- Control communications by being transparent with information.
- Provide key details and news – before being asked for it by the media.
- Make phone calls to key community leaders as soon as bad news breaks.
- Hold community meetings early and often.
- Use text messaging to alert the public, as well as specialized groups for notifications and updates of officer involved shootings.
- Share news/details of ALL officer involved shootings in multiple ways – news conferences, media releases, text alerts, website postings, social media, etc.
- Have an officer involved shooting Web page explaining process, procedures, results, etc.
- Issue an immediate news release (within 24 hours maximum) for any officer involved shooting with regular updates.
- Provide the name of the officer as soon as possible, if not in the first news release, as well as the name of the shooting victim, etc.
- Public information / public relations office (functions) report directly to the Police Chief.
- Hire civilian public information officers to lead PIO offices.

- Create a “community engagement team” within the Police Department to respond to community concerns and manage programs that create community trust and engagement.
- Have the Police Chief be the official spokesperson for officer involved shootings.
- All spokespersons should have media training.
- Use open data to improve transparency of Police Department actions.
- Study and implement recommendations of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

Ms. Parker commented on Mr. Castrilli’s presentation. She explained that she reports directly to the Chief. She handles the briefings of officer involved shootings herself. She explained her use of an initial tweet followed by an early news conference and later another by news release the next day or later the same day is much more effective than any lengthy delay. She stated that PGPD releases the identity of the decedent and the officer is released within twenty-four hours.

The subcommittee had the opportunity for some questions and comments.

Dave Statter stated that DCPD Chief Ramsay was effective at getting out stories (good and bad) before the media learned of and reported on them. Chief Ramsay provided the briefings himself. There was some discussion about advantages of having the police break the news before the media.

Brennan Murphy asked Ms. Parker about prompt release of police cruiser videos. She responded that videos are withheld until completion of the investigation. She wondered if investigations could be compromised by early release of videos. She agreed that there appears to be a trend towards early release of videos.

John Wallace inquired of Ms. Parker if her department might become all civilian. She said she was in favor of that. She conceded though that, in certain instances, there is value in the added weight of a police officer releasing information. Mr. Wallace provided multiple examples where early reporting turned out inaccurate and he expressed concern about prosecutions suffering from inaccurate early reporting of police involved shootings.

Mary Kimm commented on the many problems caused in the Geer case by inaccuracies and delays in reporting.

Doug Kay asked Ms. Parker if the civilian leadership in PG had any role in reporting of critical police incidents. She responded no. Mr. Kay asked if civilian leadership expressed concern over civil liability due to police involved shootings and whether that concern affected her transparency efforts. She responded no. Mr. Kay expressed concern that Fairfax County’s civilian leadership may be hampering transparency and inquired if the County Executive or his representative would be coming to speak to the Subcommittee. Ms. Fitzgerald pointed out that an assistant county executive was present; however, he declined the invitation to comment.

Tim Thompson asked Ms. Parker if she had received any negative comments from police that early release hurt their investigation or prosecution. She responded no.

Tom Ryan asked Ms. Parker who prevails where disputes arise between decision-makers over release of information. She explained that she seeks support from the relevant commanders in favor of prompt and detailed release of information. If that commander balks and she still wants it information released, she goes to the chief and he has always backed her up.

Dave Statter commented that, if FCPD had been more transparent, the Geer case would not have been such a problem. Ms. Parker emphasized that she does not want to put out the minimum information. Instead, she wants to put out the maximum information about critical incidents like police involved shootings.

Ms. Fitzgerald permitted each subcommittee member to make any final comments:

Eric Clingan circulated a summary of the report of the U.S. Conference of Mayors entitled: "Strengthening Police-Community Relations in America's Cities."

Patrick Smaldore circulated his written comments and recommendations regarding a Citizen's Police Academy and the Citizen's Advisory Committees.

The Subcommittee discussed an email question about release of the identity of police officers involved in shootings that Ms. Kimm directed to Ms. Fitzgerald. Mr. Ryan responded to Ms. Kimm's query. That email exchange is attached hereto.

Mr. Clingan expressed concern about a potential double standard in which the police release the identity of criminal defendants but withhold the name of officers involved in police shootings. Mr. Wallace responded that there is a difference between releasing identities of those charged with crimes and releasing the identities of officers lawfully engaged in their duties. Mr. Wallace explained further that the identity of suspects in criminal investigations are not released.

Mr. Kay asked the journalists in the group to explain the importance of releasing the identity of officers involved in shootings. Mr. Statter stated that the release of the name can lead to other alleged victims coming forward. Ms. Kimm stated that the name of the officer involved in a shooting is newsworthy and should not be withheld.

Ms. Fitzgerald then adjourned the meeting.

Doug Kay drafted the meeting notes.