



MEMORANDUM

TO: All Police Personnel  
FROM: Kenton Buckner, Chief of Police  
RE: Issues Raised from the BPOA  
DATE: July 14, 2017

KB  
7-14-17

On July 5, 2017, the Little Rock Black Police Association released a letter to City of Little Rock Board of Directors. Specifically, the letter questions decisions made surrounding the following areas within the Little Rock Police Department:

- Transfers
- Promotions
- Discipline
- Training opportunities
- Preferential treatment involving the FOP
- Overall discriminatory practices
- Policy violations

All of the issues mentioned involve personnel issues from the agency. Given the nature of the subject, and consistent with past departmental practice, neither I nor other members of the LRPD leadership can address specifics which were mentioned in the letter. I do feel, however, it is necessary to respond to our workforce to the substantive concerns raised in the letter. Where applicable, I have provided supporting documentation as well.

Based on previous letters from the BPOA in 2009 and 2012, it appears that these concerns predate my service as Chief. One of my obligations as Chief is to build a strong rapport with the employees of the Little Rock Police Department and with all of the organizations which represent employee groups. This includes the BPOA. A productive relationship with all organizations will result in the betterment of our agency as a whole.

In my three years with the LRPD, any decision I have made is based on the merits and the facts I have had at the time. Many of the decisions made by myself, and my administration, are subjective and rarely involve identical circumstances. Employees certainly have the right to disagree with my decisions. Disagreement is not synonymous with discrimination.

I am well aware of the racial sensitivities both in our city and in our police department. Our police department is a microcosm of our community. I am not naive about racism and discrimination in our society. In making decisions as Chief, I continue to strive to do the right thing, remain consistent and fair, and keep in mind what is in the best interest for our agency and our city.

Training must be a staple of a professional organization's diet. With this in mind, the department has drastically changed many aspects of our training. First, everyone in the agency receives forty hours of in-service training annually. There are a countless number of specialty training opportunities offered as well. Secondly, we have included 21st Century topics to ensure that we are reflective of best practices. Lastly, I have raised the bar for my command staff concerning training. Effective 2020, one must have a bachelor's degree to participate in the promotional process for the rank of Assistant Chief.

I have also required all those with the rank of Captain and above, to attend a nationally-ranked executive certification (e.g., FBI National Academy, Senior Management Institute Policing, and Southern Police Institute). Almost all of the Captains and Assistant Chiefs have completed the certification. In anticipation of broadening it, staff has begun to compile a list of lieutenants to consider for future opportunities. We will ensure individuals have had their first executive certification sponsored by LRPD before we begin allowing commanders to receive their second or third. These management decisions are based upon what is in the best interest of our commanders, agency, and community as a whole.

Preferential treatment towards the FOP has been a consistent complaint from the BPOA. In the Statement of Agreement, Article II, Section 1, it states that "The City recognizes the FOP, Lodge 17, as the exclusive representative agent for the employees within the unit covered by this Agreement which shall include all commissioned officers of the rank of Sergeant and below." This language clearly distinguishes the significance of the FOP. Indeed, the FOP represents over ninety percent (90%) of the agency including all races.

I have always respected the BPOA. I have given them an open door to my office to discuss issues or concerns involving the minority members they represent.

A statement I made three years ago, during the process of being selected as Little Rock's Police Chief, was misinterpreted by the BPOA and is still mentioned as one of the reasons they are displeased with me. That Question was, (paraphrased) "After a certain period of time, what are some of the successes you hope to look back and see during your tenure?" My answer to that question was, "One of the things I would like to see is our agency represented by one organization. One where we don't have to have FOP and BPOA divided." Several members from BPOA understood this to mean I wanted to disband BPOA. I have tried to clear this up with the organization on several occasions, but to no avail.

I think that any Chief would see the value in a unified department verses one where minorities don't feel that their issues or concerns are handled or investigated equally to their white counterparts. For the record, I served on the Minority Affairs Committee with the FOP of my former agency. I have an intimate understanding of feeling disconnected from an agency.

Further, I would point out the FOP has successfully filed grievances against my administration. This is a clear indication that they do not always get what they want and that we do not always agree. I am working with my third FOP President. I think that all three will tell you we are not a perfect administration, but we attempt to do business the right way. I will continue to treat both the FOP and the BPOA with dignity and respect.

Policy violations were also mentioned as a concern by the BPOA. Management reserves the right to determine when a case will be investigated, who will conduct the investigation and the final disposition of the case. Like discipline, criticism of this area is often based on partial information, and rumors. We do not have a perfect process. But I believe our process, more often than not, holds

Hiring, Transfers, and Promotions are often the subject of discussion within our agency. My goal as Chief has always been to ensure our agency is reflective of the community we serve at all levels of the agency.

Hiring primarily rests with our civil service process, and Recruitment Unit. There is always room for improvement. Indeed, since becoming Chief, I have worked diligently with the City Manager and the Human Resources Department to improve all aspects of the hiring process. During my tenure, we have hired a total of 101 police officers. Of these, the racial breakdown has been 54%-white, 33%-black, 11%-Hispanic, 1%-Asian, and 1%-other. 76% have been male with 24% female.

I have challenged our entire agency, including the FOP and BPOA, to assist us with this endeavor. Remember, any city employee who refers someone to the department will receive a \$500.00 incentive bonus if that referral makes it to day one of the academy class. We must all be recruiters!

Transfers are another sensitive issue within our agency. Consistently executive staff hears complaints of favoritism. Again, no process is perfect, and we can always improve. I have made it abundantly clear to my executive staff that I expect our specialty unit assignments and transfers to be decided through a fair process which affords equal opportunities for all officers regardless of gender or race. The LRPD leadership will always select the individual who is the best candidate for the position, and this will always be met with a great deal of scrutiny.

I have personally asked members of the BPOA Executive Board to encourage minority officers to participate in our processes. This was due, in part, to low participation among African American officers. During my tenure, 202 transfers have been made to specialty unit assignments. Of these, the racial breakdown has been 55%-white, 43%-black, and 2%-Hispanic. 81% have been male with 19% female.

Promotions are essential to the vitality and future of our agency. I have personally implored both the FOP and BPOA to assist me with getting candidates to consider moving up in our organization. I have also encouraged leadership to develop outreach efforts. For instance, our agency will be hosting a "Women in Law Enforcement Symposium" this fall to attempt to inspire, educate, and empower women to take their seat at the decision making tables within our profession. I have also individually encouraged officers, especially those whose race and gender are not well-represented in our command ranks, to apply. During my tenure, the LRPD has promoted a total of 46 individuals. Of these, the racial breakdown has been 57%-white, 41%-black, and 2%-Hispanic. 76% have been male with 24% female. The current racial breakdown for the 120 Command Staff (Chief, Assistant Chiefs, Captains, Lieutenants and Sergeants) are 58%-white, 39%-black, 2%-Hispanic and 1%-other. 82% are male with 18% female.

It is important to note that while numbers and percentages may not tell a complete story, they do give a look into the department. After reviewing the agency demographics concerning these three very sensitive areas, an objective person would see that the LRPD is genuinely committed to diversity and being reflective of the community that we serve.

Discipline was another area of concern by the BPOA. It is perhaps one of the most difficult parts of my job. I strive to ensure our processes are pure, fair, and consistent. Like other areas of my decision making, this is a very subjective area. Criticism of discipline is often based on partial information, and rumors. As I have stated earlier, officers have the right to disagree with management decisions, but disagreement does not mean you have been the victim of discrimination. For those who think they have been treated unfairly, the department has a thorough and well-documented grievance process. One of the FOP's roles is informing officers of their rights in this area.

those in violation accountable while those who have not violated LRPD policies are cleared. I am well aware this will always be an area that is highly scrutinized by our workforce because its impact to our officers. My goal is to always be consistent and fair.

In closing, I am aware of all of the criticisms that go with every decision that I make as Chief of Police. At a time like this, 100% of our energy should be focused on apprehending those responsible for our mass shooting and other criminal activity. It is counterproductive to engage in airing personnel issues publicly. Our citizens are looking to us to protect them and create a city of which we can all be proud.

Like you, I have opportunities for improvement. I will continue to strive to do the right thing, to be consistent and fair with our processes, and to work with you individually and collectively to ensure we remain a professional organization.

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cc: Bruce Moore, City Manager