



AFRICAN COMMUNITIES NETWORK
1111 E. Madison, PMB #424
Seattle, WA 98122

Dear Mayor McGinn,

We are writing to you to express our serious concerns regarding recent incidents related to the Seattle Police Department. These concerns also affect our views on the Police Chief selection process that you are now engaged in, and we hope we might provide our perspective on what the Police Department needs in order to achieve what we all want for the City: a Seattle Police Department of the absolute highest caliber that can keep all of our communities safe.

We write in many capacities: as citizens and active members of this City, as leaders of organizations that work directly with immigrants and communities of color, as former participants in other Police Accountability panels by previous Mayors, and as members of this most recent Seattle Police Chief Search Committee appointed by you.

We believe that there are many aspects of the Seattle Police Department that are, in fact, of the highest caliber. We appreciate the difficult work that police officers do every day to protect our communities and keep the peace. We also have appreciated some of the innovative programs that the Seattle Police Department has been willing to undertake, including alternatives to incarceration and diversion programs. We know that the Seattle Police Department is considered by many around the country to be on the cutting edge of local law enforcement nationally.

It is in this spirit and context that we express our deep frustration, concerns and anger around recent incidents involving police brutality and victims of color. For many years, even more than a decade, many of us in communities of color have been told that the numbers simply don't support the belief in our communities that police officers engage in racial profiling and excessive force. The two recent videotaped incidents have unleashed our anger in part because they actually document on videotape exactly the kind of behavior we believe has been happening—and has been brushed aside for lack of proof—for years. And yet, we still do not see the leadership of the Seattle Police Department taking ownership of the incidents and calling for a timely and transparent process for determining ways to address police accountability. In the case of the first video of the Latino man, it took weeks for SPD to even acknowledge the presence of a video. We were troubled both by the insulting and demeaning comments and brutality in the video as well as by the seeming suppression of the video, the lack of immediate reporting of use of force, and the lack of leadership displayed in immediately taking the issue head-on to open an honest and transparent dialogue with the community around the enormous breach of trust created by SPD officers' actions both during and after the incident.

In the case of the most recent video, we were appalled to see the brutality from the police officer on a simple jaywalking charge. This, again, is not an isolated incident. The former Auditor in the Office of Professional Accountability had documented, as early as 2006, serious concerns with the number of jaywalking incidents that led to use of force. She recommended that SPD

engage in additional and more intensified de-escalation training for officers. The most recent auditor just this year documented the same concerns, showing that little has been done by the Department.

In spite of participation by one of us in the Police Accountability Panel, which resulted in 27 recommendations for improved police accountability in Seattle, provided in early 2009 and implemented in 2009, we note that any system is only as good as the people who implement the system. We believe that the police accountability process is failing us in important ways when recommendations are given but not acted on, and when investigations seem to always produce the same results that uniformly benefit the Police Department. This leads to communities losing faith in any semblance of impartiality, furthered by the fact that the OPA resides within the Police Department and is accountable to the Chief of Police.

In the recent 2009 Office of Professional Accountability Statistics recently released, for example, we note that not a single use of force complaint was upheld, even though some 12% of total complaints were sustained. This seems unusual, at best, and biased, at worst.

Given all of these concerns, we feel strongly that the most important issues in determining whether the Seattle Police Department moves to the next level of excellence are the Department's of relationships with communities of color, racial profiling and police accountability must be addressed immediately. These are the areas where the Department has the most to accomplish and cannot afford to fail. As mentioned, many other areas of the Seattle Police Department are strong. We believe the next leader of the Seattle Police Department must be someone who has strong expertise in dealing with these kinds of issues, building trust in communities, and the leadership to be on the frontlines of addressing controversial issues. We would like to see the Chief of Police immediately addressing communities in the wake of incidents like the ones that have recently occurred.

While we understand the need for thorough investigations, what we also understand is that communities of color need to see demonstrated and articulated leadership from the Chief himself/herself that any police officer actions of this sort will be thoroughly investigated. Moreover, that the Chief himself/herself would stand by a clear and often articulated set of values and principles that tolerate no brutality, no excessive use of force, no profiling, and no dishonesty by the Seattle Police Department. If this is the tone that is consistently set—both within the Department and to the public—and then implemented, we believe Seattle will have the best police department in the country.

We respect tremendously the integrity and service of Interim Chief John Diaz. He has been a loyal, thoughtful and serious leader in the Seattle Police Department over the years. It is with great respect to him and to all of the officers in the Seattle Police Department that we offer our perspective that the best leader for the Seattle Police Department is someone from the outside who has tremendous experience and leadership abilities in the areas described above. We believe that Chief of Police candidate Ron Davis fits that bill and we hope that you and Seattle City Council members will support him as the next leader of the Seattle Police Department.

We have also been very troubled by rumors raised questioning the fitness of Chief Ron Davis as a candidate. Concerns such as whether he can go from managing a small department to a large one are legitimate and were thought through by the Selection Committee in our decision to move

his candidacy forward. We assume that you also are considering those kinds of legitimate issues. However, hearsay about people who may have left his Department and why, or whether or not his Department was open and welcoming because of those departures should only be considered if there is someone willing to speak openly about those issues. Certainly, we could look at the Seattle Police Department and individuals who have recently been public about concerns around whether or not SPD is welcoming to women officers as well. Ultimately, we simply express our deep hope that rumors will not be put forward as reasons for dismissing his candidacy without full investigation to determine the legitimacy of the rumors. Should it be determined that Chief Davis is not the right candidate for the job, we regretfully believe that in the light of recent events, it is important to look for additional outside candidates.

We understand that this is a difficult decision and one of the most critical you will make as Mayor. We believe it is useful to ask in what areas does the Seattle Police Department still need to make improvements to complement its strengths to become one of the best police departments in the country? To us, the answer is clear. We need leadership and change to ensure action on police accountability, stop racial profiling and build strong relationships of trust with communities of color. This is the missing piece and the piece the next Chief of Police must deliver. Our communities depend on it.

We thank you for your consideration of these concerns. Please contact us if we can answer any further questions.

Sincerely,

Pramila Jayapal
Executive Director
OneAmerica

Ahoua Kone
President of Board of Directors
African Community Networks

Cc: Seattle City Council Members
Darryl Smith, Deputy Mayor