

A VOTE FOR CONSOLIDATION

Civilian Police Review Board + Consolidation = Win for Everybody

On Tuesday, August 27th, Allegheny County Council voted down (9-6) a bill to create an independent civilian police review board for the entire county. This legislation was brought to the forefront by Allegheny County Councilman DeWitt Walton in the wake of the fatal police shooting of an unarmed, black 17-year old Antwon Rose in East Pittsburgh, which is adjacent to Pittsburgh. This legislation would have provided for a county-wide civilian police review board that would have been tasked with investigating allegations of misconduct against Allegheny County Police and suburban officers, but only if those municipalities opt-in. If the municipality decides not to opt-in, the county has no jurisdiction over municipal police departments.

I believe it is important to have a county-wide Civilian Police Review Board as well as a consolidation of local police departments throughout Allegheny County. There are 105 municipalities in Allegheny County with police departments, many are staffed with part-time officers, others often divert funds from other items in their budgets to fund their policing efforts. Throughout Allegheny County many of these police departments lack appropriate and proper training, as well as, adequate funding.

The sheer number of police departments in Allegheny County strain boroughs and municipalities and make it difficult to properly train and manage police officers. I believe that a civilian review of police departments along with consolidation will create an environment where police officers can be properly trained and held accountable for their mistakes. I believe that when we consolidate police departments and create a centralized civilian review board, it will cut down on incidents like Officer Michael Rossfield killing Antwon Rose in East Pittsburgh. Officer Rossfield should not have been on the force in East Pittsburgh. Through consolidation and sharing of information, we can insure that officers who have previous incidents do not get hired in other police departments in the county.

I believe that consolidating law enforcement services throughout the county would serve our region well. Smaller municipalities would not have to compete against larger municipalities with larger budgets for the same resources. Where some municipalities are staffed with part-time officers making \$10 to \$12 per hour there are other municipalities who pay upwards of \$60,000 per year to their officers.

Consolidation can be an appealing idea for many reasons, particularly to smaller municipalities and their governing bodies. Consolidation can produce a higher volume of police services, lower response time, reduce overtime, duplication of effort, and lower overall operating costs.

Consolidation can also increase resources, and capacity. The quality of policing would rise under consolidation as a result of more efficient and coordinated use of manpower, more flexibility to meet hours of peak demand, enhanced training opportunities, and improved management and supervision. Consolidation seems especially attractive when you consider that police departments will be able to share records and criminal data throughout the region and across municipalities, which will lead to better targeted policing and cutting down on crime in both the city and the county. This to me would be especially helpful to city and county decision makers where fragmentation or redundancy in policing may be present and where fiscal challenges exist.

If we had civilian police review and a regionalized database of officer involved incidents, it would not have been as easy for Officer Rossfield to move from department to department without scrutiny. In Allegheny County, we have too many small police departments that do not have the time nor the resources to perform thorough background checks before hiring. However, if we had a county-wide centralized database along with the civilian review board, I believe that these problems would be pointed out before an officer had the chance to get hired in a new department. I also believe that cutting down on the number of police departments will cut down on the number of places that bad apples can hide. In order to solve the nationwide problem of officer involved shootings, I believe the problem requires a multifaceted approach. I believe civilian review is a step in the right direction but it can't be the only step. We need to regionalize police departments and provide more resources and better training for local police officers. If we continue with the current structure, we will see more police departments like East Pittsburgh shut their doors and rely on the state police to police their communities and I don't believe that's the best option. I believe a strong investment in regional community policing and training is necessary along with civilian review.