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SFPD Chief Suhr Meets with African-American Advisory Forum

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On Wednesday, December 30, San Francisco Police Chief Greg Suhr met with members of the Chief's African-American Advisory Forum to discuss recent events affecting the relationship between the police and some communities within our city.

During the discussion, the Chief acknowledged that the December 2, 2015, officer-involved shooting of Mario Woods has for many residents shaken their trust in their city's Police Department. He also expressed his sorrow for the loss of this young man and the pain it has caused his family, friends, and the African-American community.

"We moved through our pain to be productive for peace and prosperity in this town. And we are maintaining a working relationship to ensure that this kind of senseless killing does not happen again," said Forum member Reverend Amos Brown, the President of the San Francisco NAACP.

Chief Suhr spoke to the Advisory members to emphasize, that despite reports by some members of the media to the contrary, no conclusions have been reached with regard to the justification of the shooting. The officers involved have been reassigned to non-patrol duties while investigations by the San Francisco Police Department, the District Attorney's Office, and the Office of Citizen Complaints are being conducted.

While these independent investigations are ongoing, the Department recognizes nothing can change the way people feel when they watch the video of the shooting. Forum members stated that if this can be in policy, then any policy that allows for this to happen needs to be changed. The Police Department understands that we need to do everything we can to prevent this from occurring again, including reviewing all policies and procedures related to the use of force.

Immediately following the shooting, the Police Department took the following steps:

- A new policy was issued making the pointing of a firearm a reportable use-of-force incident. This means that any time an officer points a firearm at an individual(s), whether it is fired or not, the officer must complete a report detailing why this action was necessary.
- The firearms training and certification process has been changed to better control gunfire – especially by support officers – by slowing officers down, emphasizing the use of less-lethal options and moving from

“shoot-don’t shoot” decision making to the use of de-escalation techniques.

- The Police Department added more less-lethal alternatives including protective shields for deployment as soon as training can be identified and ordered additional extended range impact weapons (“less lethal” bean bag guns) that will effectively double the amount of these “less-lethal” options on the streets available for any situation.
- Entered the national discussion led by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) on the “Re-engineering Training on the Police Use of Force” to be held in Washington D.C. in mid-January. Chief Suhr, Police Commissioner President Suzy Loftus, staff from Supervisor Malia Cohen’s Office, the Officer in Charge of the Police Academy, and the Officer in Charge of the Crisis Intervention Training Program will be attending. The group will arrive at a curriculum to fundamentally change how police officers use force.
- Initiated a working group to develop new strategies and tactics to best contend with active incidents involving individuals armed with edged/non-firearm weapons. This new approach will stress the need to isolate and contain the suspect/incident so officers may then use time, distance, and rapport to reach a peaceful resolution without having to resort to deadly force.

In addition, the Police Department continues our commitment to ensuring all officers are trained in the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model to de-escalate encounters with people in crisis to safely resolve the situation. Currently there are 386 CIT-trained officers. Every recruit at the Police Academy now receives training in the CIT model and graduates CIT certified. This means that de-escalation technique training is equal to or exceeds the amount of training officers receive in the use of firearms.

"As the President of the Officers For Justice Peace Officers Association, we are in full support of 21st Century Policing and police reform," said OFJ President Yulanda D.A. Williams. "We respect and appreciate the solutions being implemented by Chief Greg Suhr."

The Advisory members supported the efforts made by the Department thus far and made additional recommendations that they believed are needed to change the culture within the Police Department to strengthen the bond with our communities:

Cultural competency training: Leaders from various communities will participate in the training of Academy recruits and on-going training of all other rank-and-file members on cultural competency, procedural justice, and implicit bias.

Interaction at the District Level: Captains will be directed to work with leaders in their respective community to identify hotspots and to assign more senior officers knowledgeable of those neighborhoods to resolve conflicts that might occur there.

Go forward with Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Review: The Chief asked the U.S. Department of Justice’s COPS Office to do a “Collaborative Reform Review” of the Department’s policies, procedures, and training. Additionally, the COPS team will work with the Department on a “Critical Response Review” to assist in developing a best practice “Active Edged/Other Weapon Strategy.” We need to resolve - without the use of force - critical incidents where the person involved is armed with a non-firearm weapon.

Re-evaluate the Training Stations: Assess where recruits are assigned and trained following the academy to better meet the needs of the immediate community with an emphasis on cultural sensitivity.

In May of 2015, Chief Suhr asked leaders from San Francisco’s African-American community to participate in an advisory forum with the objective of building trust between the African-American community and the San Francisco Police Department. Through open dialogue, forum members have generated strategies addressing

community concerns including the recruitment of more African-American officers, cultural sensitive training, and more effective community policing.

“If you want to help better your community, then you cannot be scared to stand up for your community when others do not agree,” said Potrero Hill community activist Uzuri Pease-Greene.

The members of the Chief’s African American Advisory Forum are:

Ms. Jackie Battle, Joseph Lee Rec Center/San Francisco Recreation and Parks
Mr. Ray Bobbitt, Father Figure Project
Mr. Dion-Jay Brookter, Young Community Developers
Reverend Amos Brown, NAACP, 3rd Baptist Church
Reverend Ishmael Burch, St. Andrews Baptist Church
Reverend Larry Chatmon, St. Paul of the Shipwreck Church
Pastor Robert Cowan, River of Life Church
Ms. Sheryl Davis, Mo’ MAGIC
Mr. Landon Dickey, San Francisco Unified School District
Mr. Al Harris, OMI Neighbors In Action
Mr. G. L. Hodge, Providence Baptist Church, San Francisco Interfaith Council
Mr. Marion Jackson, Officers For Justice
Reverend Calvin Jones, Jr., Providence Baptist Church
Commissioner Leroy Lindo, San Francisco Housing Authority
Mr. Esan Looper, Boys and Girls Club
Dr. Joe Marshall, San Francisco Police Commission, Alive and Free – Omega Boys Club
Ms. Lena Miller, Hunter’s Point Families
Mr. Theodore Miller, Mayor’s Office
Mr. John Nauer, San Francisco Street Violence Intervention Program
Ms. Uzuri Pease-Greene, Community Awareness Resource Entity (C.A.R.E.)
Mr. Shawn Richard, Brothers Against Guns
Ms. Mattie Scott, Healing Circle for the Soul
Reverend Arnold Townsend, Minister Without Walls, EOC
Julius Turman, San Francisco Police Commissioner
Reverend Arelious Walker, Tabernacle Community Development Corporation
Mr. Shamman Walton, Young Community Developers
Sergeant Yulanda Williams, Officers For Justice
Reverend Christopher Zacharias, First American Episcopal Zion Church.

In addition, Police Commission President Suzy Loftus was present for, and participated in, last night’s discussion at the request of the Forum.

"I am grateful to work with these community leaders as we chart a path forward to repair the relationship of trust between the San Francisco Police Department and the African American community," said Suzy Loftus, President of the Police Commission.

“We need to have a strong, working relationship with the communities we serve,” said Chief Suhr, "Trust is the ‘coin of the realm’ in everything we do as police officers. When people have a voice, and we listen and are objective and respectful, we gain the trust of the people. The community must believe in us.”

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