



# HARRISON POLICE REVIEW AND REFORM COMMITTEE REPORT

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SUBMITTED MARCH 5, 2021



## 2 THE PROCESS

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- This committee was tasked by Mayor Belmont to address Governor Cuomo's Executive Order 203 of 2020 to collaborate on reforms to improve and modernize policing within the Town/Village of Harrison, NY.
- The spirit of the efforts of this committee, and the findings and recommendations provided in its report, are put forth to identify ways to support the department's mission to enhance the quality of life in Harrison by working in partnership with the community and in accordance with constitutional rights to enforce laws, preserve the peace, reduce fear, and provide a safe environment.
- Your committee discussed and researched all the suggested topics from the Executive Order.
- We focused on issues that were pertinent to Harrison.



### 3 THE PROCESS

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- Two public “listening” sessions were conducted, each lasting more than two hours.
  - 53 residents attended, more than half spoke.
  - An additional 10 emails were received by the Town and passed to the committee.
- Seven committee meetings were held, totaling nearly 300 hours cumulative time by the volunteers.
- Committee members represent a diverse cross section of Harrison, demographically, geographically and racially.
- Open, honest, forthright discussions were held. All participants were encouraged to speak freely and delve into the sensitive topics that needed to be addressed. Opinions were treated with respect.



## 4 PUBLIC FEEDBACK RECEIVED BY THE COMMITTEE WAS OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE

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- While all recognized that there is always room for improvement, a consistent theme sounded by the public and our committee was that the Harrison Police Department does a great job in protecting our community.
- Harrison Police Department is accredited by the New York State Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Council. Fewer than one in four municipal police agencies meet and maintain adherence to the Council's exacting, state-of-the-art standards.
- Public comments included numerous reports of positive interactions with the community from school-aged children through the School Resource Officer Program, to Senior Citizens through town recreation programs.
- A notable number of Harrison residents, both white and non-white, reported negative interactions between people of color and police officers.



## 5 WHAT WE LOOKED AT

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- The committee followed the instructions of the Executive Order to perform a comprehensive review of the HPD's policies and procedures and make recommendations designed to “foster trust, fairness and legitimacy and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color.”
- The committee approached these responsibilities with a focus on both those areas where our residents are satisfied, as well as those areas where we saw opportunities for improvement. We believe that implementation of these recommendations would strengthen relations and improve interactions between members of the department and people of color, and between the department and members of other diverse groups here in Harrison, and our community in general.



## 6 WHAT WE LOOKED AT

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- Use of force policies;                      Procedural justice;
- Studies addressing systemic racial bias or racial justice in policing;
- Implicit bias awareness training;      De-escalation training and practices;
- Law enforcement assisted diversion programs;
- Restorative justice practices;              Community-based outreach and conflict resolution;
- Problem-oriented policing;              Hot spots policing;
- Focused deterrence;                      Prevention through environmental design, and
- Violence prevention and reduction interventions.



## 7 WHAT WE LOOKED AT – USE OF FORCE

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- The Committee reviewed policing standards set forth by a full spectrum of sources including, but not limited to, law enforcement organizations, non-governmental organizations, and academic writing.
- Non-governmental entities including, but not limited to, 8CANTWAIT.
- 21st Century Policing Implementation Guide: Moving from Recommendations to Action.
- Harrison Police Department policies that concern public-police interactions are consistent with and/or meet or exceed standards set by leading law enforcement organizations, including:
  - National Consensus Policy on Use of Force (July 2020)
  - International Association of Chiefs of Police - Bias-Free Policing (Jan. 2021), Arrests and Investigatory Stops (Sept. 2019), and Reporting Use of Force (Mar. 2017)
  - NYS Municipal Police Training Council - Use of Force Model Policy (Sept. 2020)



## 8 WHAT WE LOOKED AT – USE OF FORCE

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- There have only been 17 “use of force” interactions over the past 5 years. All of these incidents involved the use of tasers for disturbed or agitated persons. These 17 events were the only uses of force out of more than 55,000 recorded interactions by the Department over the five-year period.
- Choke Holds are prohibited by NYS and HPD Policy, except in a life-threatening situation.
- Duty to intervene policy - if an officer at the scene of an incident believes that another officer is using unnecessary excessive force.
- All use of force incidents must be reported to New York State.
- There have been no in-custody fatalities at the Harrison Police Department.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 10 INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY AT HARRISON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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- Harrison Police Department aspires to be more reflective of the town demographic makeup by:
  - Continued proactive recruitment of officers from other agencies through resignation and reinstatement
  - A recruitment campaign has been initiated and will be implemented in connection with the 2021 Police Officer entrance exam is announced
  - HPD plans to solicit the assistance of the community to spread the announcement of the exam and actively recruit members of our community
  - Meet & Greet with Harrison Police Officers after the announcement and during enrollment to encourage all interested and qualified community members to take the test



## II INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY AT HARRISON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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- The staffing of the police force should be more reflective of the actual population of the community it serves. Using the most up to date census data can help the Town Board and the Chief devise strategies to meet this recommendation. Some potential steps which may help to adjust any imbalance are outlined as follows:
  - For at least 2 academy classes, right after the new list is issued, the PD can opt to use the county list to see if that will help them get closer to a more reflective roster. If there is no noticeable difference, they can go back to using the town list. Once they go back to the town list, they will not be able to go back to the general list again until a new list is established in four years, unless there are less than 3 potential candidates on the town list.



## 12 INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY AT HARRISON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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- Police Officer and Police Officer (Spanish speaking) examinations will be held on 5/15/21 OR 5/16/21. **Applications must be submitted online by March 29, 2021.** If a significant number of minorities take and pass the test, continued use of the town list remains a viable option.
- A benefit to the Town list is that candidates that don't score as high on the overall County list maybe available for hire on the local list.



## 13 INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY AT HARRISON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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- Department Media and/or Social Media campaign advertising the upcoming test, with an emphasis on attracting diverse candidates.
- Include links to sign-up webpage and web study guide.
- Funding for specific recruitment initiatives should be included in the department's operating budget.



## 14 IMPLICIT BIAS

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- Harrison Police Department will benefit from additional Implicit Bias education.
- Concern about the dearth of good training opportunities that translate into usable information and techniques to recognize biases and be able to address them while in a situation with the public.
- Consider using outside, accredited programs in addition to or in place of state provided courses.
- Continue to reinforce this important topic at roll call and other gatherings to raise officer awareness.



## 15 IMPLICIT BIAS

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- Critical Elements of Implicit Bias Learning:
  - Relationship based – our police department flourishes best when building bridges to our community, which means generating trust through authentic outreach to all town residents, and particularly non-white residents, who may be hesitant to report or discuss experiences.
  - At a minimum, the learning should cover the following concepts: unconscious bias, micro-aggressions, cultural competency, and developing inclusive thinking/mindsets. These help to mitigate and unravel implicit biases.
  - It should be live and experiential – watching a video in and of itself is incomplete; the learning must be live (virtual and/or in-person when permissible) and be instructor-led. It should create an experience where police officers can at least get a feel for what it is like to be on the receiving end of bias.



## 16 IMPLICIT BIAS

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- Critical Elements of Implicit Bias Learning
  - It must help officers generate empathy – at its best, implicit bias learning creates opportunities for officers to understand the experiences of people who are different from them.
  - It must demonstrate the value of difference – helping officers to learn about being open to different points of view and experiences, even if those points of view do not conform to their own.
  - It must push officers to think through their own biases and understand how those biases may play out in interactions with the public. It is not punitive, but it must generate introspection and self-reflection, which is necessary to embracing an inclusive mindset.
  - It must equip officers with the communication tools necessary when interacting with people who are visibly and culturally different from them.



## 17 IMPLICIT BIAS

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- Critical Elements of Implicit Bias Learning:
  - It should be ongoing – once the officers have gone through the learning, there should be a program that provides continuous learning (this could be e-learning, once the foundation is set with live learning), to further embed the principles so that they can be applied in everyday situations.
  - There should be a community component - as a part of the ongoing learning program, there should be opportunities for town residents to hear from the officers themselves what they have learned and how they will be applying said learnings in everyday interactions with the public. This would be of particular value to non-white residents and white residents who have non-white family members/friends who visit our community. This would also help town residents appreciate the challenges officers face on a daily basis.



## 18 IMPLICIT BIAS – FINAL THOUGHTS

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- This endeavor is not easy work. Overcoming implicit bias is a multi-layered and multi-disciplined practice that requires time, patience, and a willingness to push oneself out of one's comfort zone. It requires that one truly be open and willing to look at oneself in a way that might not always be favorable to the individual.
- However, when one can step into the discomfort that this kind of learning inevitably brings to the surface, one can become an even better public servant and an even better example of inclusive thinking, behavior, and decision-making.
- Consideration – when choosing a provider to do the training, look at organizations with a relationship-based approach that incorporates the community, ideally one that has experience with law enforcement.



## 19 SOCIAL MEDIA

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- A comprehensive social media policy ensures that employees are aware of the effect that their online behavior may have on the image and effectiveness of the department and should be maintained and reviewed at regular intervals to ensure proper protections for the department and town.
- The department's social media guidelines should, among other things and to the extent legally permissible, prohibit speech that slanders, disparages, or otherwise expresses bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals, or otherwise undermines the ability of the department to successfully perform its duties. It should ensure that staff and sworn personnel are aware that adherence to the Department's code of conduct is required in their personal use of online social media and that failure to adhere to the social media guidelines may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of office.
- HPD enacted a social media policy in 2017 that is consistent with current "best practices." The committee recommends that this policy be maintained and that HPD regularly review and update it to keep up with the rapid pace of change in social media.



## 20 PUBLIC COMPLAINT PROCESS

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- The Town Board as the Police Commission should make public its process by which complaints to or about the Harrison Police Department are made and how they are reviewed.
- The Harrison Police Department should also make public the process by it receives and reviews which complaints.
- At minimum these processes should include:
  - The process should be straightforward, easy to navigate and allow for anonymous reporting.
  - All complaints should be investigated.
  - There should be protection against retaliation for filing a complaint.
  - Complainants should be notified of the resolution of their complaint within a reasonable time frame.



## 21 ENHANCED TRANSPARENCY

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- The department should develop a method of logging every police enforcement interaction, even those that do not result in an arrest or violation, to include discernable demographic information about the individual(s) involved.
- Recognize that most people will not, and do not, file complaints, especially if they are not charged or issued a ticket.
- Regular review of the interaction log to be performed by department management.
- Quarterly reporting of trends to the Town/Village Board in their capacity as Police Commissioners.



## 22 RECOMMEND BODY CAMERAS TO BE WORN BY ALL OFFICERS INTERACTING WITH THE PUBLIC

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- The committee commends the Town/Village for authorizing the purchase and implementation of individual body cameras for all personnel that interact with the public.
- Body Cameras hold both the public and the officer more accountable for their actions and that can assist in de-escalating situations.
- The department is developing a comprehensive use policy that follows strict state of the art professional standards and adherence to manufacturer's specified use.
- The committee looks forward to seeing this policy adopted and the cameras put into use sometime in 2021.



## 23 TRAINING IS KEY

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- The Town/Village should take steps to increase the mandatory training for all officers and supervisors, revising the current employment contracts through collective bargaining.
- Professional development requires significant time for educators to grapple with new strategies and skills, understandings, and implementation challenges. Studies found teachers required as much as 50 hours of instruction, practice, and coaching (French, 1997).
- Our police department is asked to handle a myriad of issues every day. Domestic violence, sexual abuse, mental health issues, criminal activities, lost children and social injustice are just a few things they are confronted with.



## 24 TRAINING IS KEY

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- Additional training subjects to be considered include cultural, ethnic, racial and sexual diversity and modern societal problems.
- Training should focus on solutions, not just techniques.
  - Accredited training courses
  - Training Standards should be in keeping with up-to-date professional protocols.
- Need for resources for constant training for implicit bias and de-escalation.
- These training opportunities need to be full day courses or more. Not just roll call in-service.



## 25 TRAINING IS KEY

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- The Town/Village should consider reviewing its policies on educational reimbursement for college courses to include the types of subjects that would support handling some of the issues outlined above, such as foreign language training, social work and modern societal problems.
- Leadership/Management training for command staff personnel.
- Funding for the additional training is imperative in order to effectuate any actual “on the ground” behavioral changes.



## 26 ENSURE VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP IS SUSTAINABLE

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- Emphasis on Department Mission and Values.
- Succession planning is vital to ensuring that a values-based culture is permeated throughout the ranks of the department.
- Even more important, succession planning provides a maintainable system that constantly reinforces the department's social, professional and leadership values.
- The Town/Village Board in its capacity as Police Commissioners should regularly review departmental values and succession planning with the Chief.



## 27 HARRISON POLICE DEPARTMENT IS A VALUABLE ASSET TO THE HARRISON SCHOOL DISTRICT

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- The police are trusted partners in ensuring the safety and well-being of students, faculty, and staff.
- District administration is in regular communication with our police department. SROs often assist families in crisis.
- HPD has relationships with all six building principals.
- HPD is familiar with our buildings' floorplans, participates in our drills, and maintains high visibility around our schools.
- Every officer has the Harrison School District safety app and access to video cameras to assist in any emergency.
- HPD is an essential part of our safety plan. HPD is typically on campus during scheduled fire drills.



## 28 HARRISON POLICE DEPARTMENT IS A VALUABLE ASSET TO THE HARRISON SCHOOL DISTRICT

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- Police are active and visible at school functions on campus and off, including carnivals, parades, athletic events, concerts, plays, and back-to-school nights.
- HPD incorporates all school campuses into its regular patrols and during special events, providing a sense of security and ease for students, parents, and faculty.
- HPD provides invaluable support, oversight, and security at large-scale events, most notably the Harrison Rye football game, which often involves over 4,000 people.
- HCSD has a full partnership with the police department in keeping our 3,600 students safe.



## 29 SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAM IS A VALUABLE ASSET FOR HARRISON

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- The success of the program has been built upon many years of experience.
  - Community policing at its most basic level – with kids.
  - Promotes restorative justice practices.
  - Positive models for youth who may be interested and encouraged to pursue a career in law enforcement. Take the Test!!
  - Continue to have SRO participate in classes. This reinforces great relationships between police and students.
  - Provide opportunities for kids who feel that that might have been treated unfairly by the school or police to have specific meetings with the SRO to find a better solution.



## 30 THANKS!

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- First and foremost, the committee thanks Chief John Vasta for his unsurpassed commitment to our town.
- He was open to discussing anything we brought to him and his professionalism and willingness to address all these issues and embrace changes made our job much easier.
- Sergeant Gentile was very helpful in providing a front-line perspective to our deliberations.
- To Mike Piccini for getting our Zoom meetings right! Kerry Marrano for getting us set and running.
- Thank you to our liaisons for their insights from the Town Board, District Attorney and Legal Aid Society.



## 31 THANKS!

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- Most of all, thank you to the residents and committee members who gave their time, their wisdom, their opinions and their passion for making Harrison even a better place to live, work and play.
- Despite the challenges brought by Covid-19 and conflicting time schedules, they all brought their unique outlook to the discussions, sometimes even while commuting!
- This is important work, and we all feel honored to be chosen to assist your Honorable Board in making some important reforms that will ensure the continued success of our wonderful police department and our town.



## 32 COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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- In accordance with New York State Governor Cuomo Executive Order 203, Mayor Belmont appointed the following residents to the Harrison Police Review and Reform Committee:
- Brian Blake                      Watson Baker              David Gelfarb              Royce Battleman
- Gary Chiarella                      Calvin Gray              Tom Ardis              Sharif Nesheiwat
- Jim Anderson                      Amaleta Forbes              Helen Remeza              Dr. Louis Wool
- Tom Scappaticci                      Joseph Stout              Chief John Vasta              Sgt. Carmine Gentile
- Liaisons:
- Richard Dioniso, Town Board; Cindy Adimari, DA; Sherry Levin Wallach, Legal aid