

Report to the LWFNC Board

LWFNC Policing Practices Working Group

January 11, 2021

Background

The League of Women Voters of North Carolina (LWFNC) Policing Practices Working Group (PPWG) was created in July of 2020. During the protests, demonstrations, and debate over the unlawful death of George Floyd and other Black citizens at the hands of police officers, LWFNC members sought ways to become involved utilizing the principles of the League.

Initially, the group found that individual League members had conducted research into police practices and some local leagues were planning programs as well. Nationwide, the group found examples of State and Local Leagues conducting studies, creating positions and passing resolutions for advocacy and action on a multitude of criminal justice issues. (At this time, LWFNC has no position specifically addressing law enforcement.)

The PPWG decided to narrow the scope by researching one issue, the interaction of communities with law enforcement in North Carolina.

The PPWG determined the best course of action was to research law enforcement agencies at a local level and educate League members through a monthly series of virtual events focusing on a specific area each month.

August **What You Know, What You Don't Know, What You Want to Know**

September **Hiring Standards and Recruiting**

October **Training Standards and Practices**

November **Oversight**

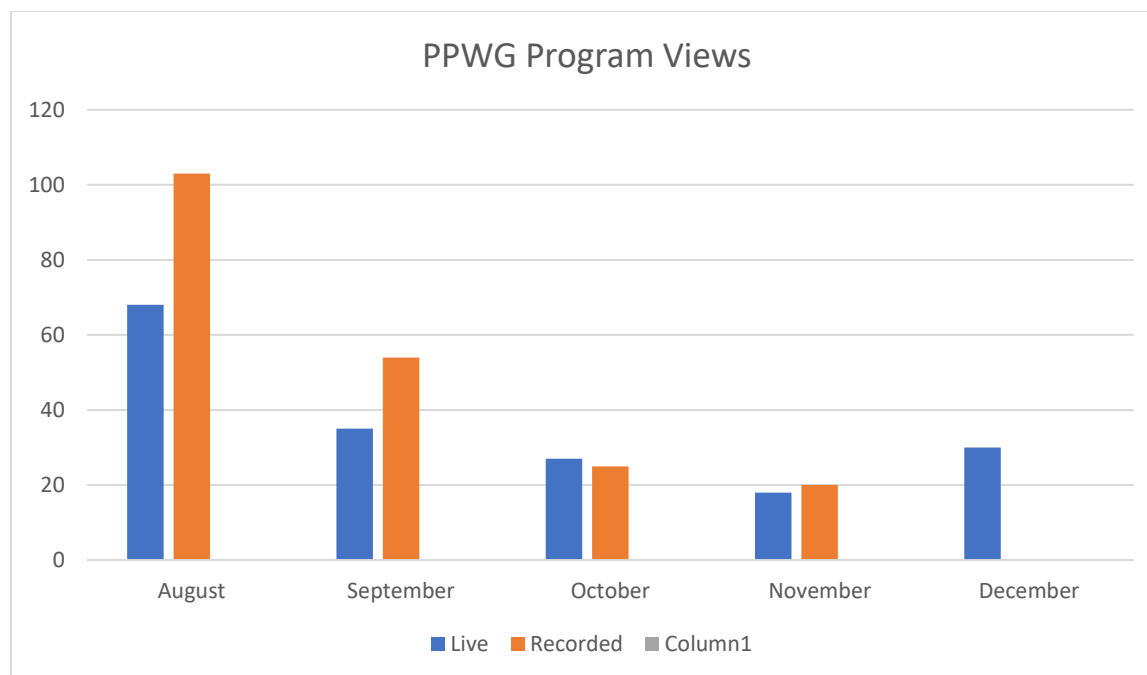
December **Where Do We Go From Here?**

The programs were conducted via Zoom and consisted of informative presentations, live and pre-recorded interviews and participant input.

The programs also made use of polls and surveys to encourage participation. Programs were recorded and posted on the LWVNC YouTube page.

The programs were promoted on the LWVNC website and newsletter as well as by local Leagues. The public was invited to all programs. The programs can be viewed here: <https://my.lwv.org/north-carolina-state/article/lwvncs-five-part-virtual-program-law-enforcement>

Attendance was good considering these programs were presented during an extremely active election period and overlapped into the holidays.



What We Learned

We found there are over 600 separate law enforcement agencies throughout North Carolina. About one third of these have fewer than ten sworn officers.

Over the course of this project, we found that while many of the local agencies we approached would talk with us, others were far less helpful.

Most local law enforcement agencies have social media outlets, with Facebook and Twitter being the most popular. Some used these platforms as public

relations tools while others put out official notices. Most we found were up to date and encouraged feedback from the public.

Most agencies have contact numbers on their (or city/county) websites. Many have identified Public Information Officers or Community Outreach officers. Some have specific information or links for citizen complaints.

Some agencies offer Citizens' Academies, which can be an immersive program to meet local leadership, learn in depth about their missions and start to develop a long-term relationship.

North Carolina has two state commissions that implement and oversee hiring standards, one for police agencies and the other for the 100 Sheriff's Offices in the state. The North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Standards Commission oversees police agencies, while the North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Standards Commission oversees sheriffs' offices. North Carolina is the only state to have a separate commission to cover Sheriffs.

Both have similar standards with some differences. For example, the Sheriffs' commission does not require a psychological review for hiring. Both commissions operate similarly in granting law enforcement certification with minor differences in paperwork.

Both commissions enforce statewide standards for hiring but local agencies *can* exceed those standards.

The Sheriff's Commission has 17 members made up of 12 Sheriffs and 5 government appointees, the Criminal Justice Commission has 34 members appointed from law enforcement, government and academia. Both State Commissions hold open meetings quarterly in Raleigh.

These same two commissions also control the initial and on-going training required for every officer and deputy. Basic Law Enforcement Training for incoming officers and deputies is reviewed on a regular basis and is currently under review. The required North Carolina curriculum is 640 hours, which is slightly higher than the national average. We think those numbers should increase significantly, and some agencies already require and provide more

training. Other recommendations include adding more classes in ethics, community policing, de-escalation, mental health issues and more.

Annual In-Service Training for working law enforcement officers is reviewed every year and is often influenced by current events and occasionally citizen input. While there are statewide requirements, each local agency can tailor additional training to meet local concerns.

Training costs money to develop and takes time and manpower to deliver. There should be consideration of reallocation of the funds to reflect community priorities in staffing and training. Budgeting is usually discussed and decided at City Council and County Commission meetings.

In North Carolina, there are very few citizen boards with oversight duties. Those that do exist cannot compel testimony, subpoena records or enforce disciplinary action. They are mostly powerless and their impact on police actions is unknown.

Because of current personnel records laws, Internal investigations and results are not public record. Even the fact that there is an ongoing investigation is not available. If criminal charges are filed or an officer goes to an administrative court for appeal, *then* the information from those procedures becomes public. These rules also apply to the two state commissions investigating whether to rescind an officer's certification.

Local leadership and the prevailing 'Police Culture' play a large role in the effectiveness of Internal Oversight.

State and Local Leagues in the US are involved in creating or updating positions for advocacy and action. These positions include (but are not limited to) Use of Force, Oversight, Racial Bias, Mental Health Intervention, Hiring Standards, Tracking Bad Police Officers, Training, Funding, Overincarceration, Jail and Prison Conditions, Cash Bail Reform and more.

Working with other groups to research police often leads to conflicts of interest or competing priorities. While collectively the groups may have common goals, the areas each group wants to devote resources to varies.

Leagues may advocate for police reform using established League positions such as Social Justice or Open Government.

What We Do Next

Throughout the programs, the PPWG encouraged League members to contact their local law enforcement leaders and start a dialogue. Leagues with Observer Teams can report on City and County budget meetings.

At this time, there does not seem to be enough interest or commitment for a statewide study for a consensus on policing in North Carolina.

One possibility to overcome this problem is to assign members to a State Task Force to explore the study issues and make recommendations for a position to the board and membership.

A limited survey showed some interest in concurring with an established State League's position however, many positions address issues beyond the scope of what the PPWG explored. While these positions do contain points that could apply to North Carolina, there is a question of whether a "line-item concurrence" is procedurally correct. We would ask that the State League clarify proper procedure for pursuing a concurrence with another League's position. We are currently looking at LWV of California and LWV of Roseville, MN positions for possible concurrence recommendations.

If there is enough interest, a new statewide working group that focuses on policing practices can be formed. Members of this group can support Local Leagues interested in learning more about local police practices, create a clearinghouse of information, e-mail updates of current legislation or articles of interest, and put together a toolkit of resources, talking points, graphics, etc. Statewide guidelines could also be developed for Local Leagues regarding what action can be taken under current LWVUS and LWVNC positions.

Thanks

Throughout our project the Group met many people from state and local agencies who talked to League members and shared their expertise. These public servants, officers and civilians, patiently explained policy and procedure, answered scores of questions and took time out of their busy schedules to help us understand the police role in our communities.

Stephen Combs, Director of North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission

Diane Konopka, Director of North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission

Lt. Andy Anderson, Division of Professional Responsibility, Henderson County Sheriff's Office

Trever Allen, Director of North Carolina Justice Academy

Shaun Ward, D.M., Director of Strategic Development, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

Lt. Joey Sorrells, Professional Standards, Asheville Police Department

La Becky Roe, Charlotte Citizens Review Board

David Bland, Raleigh Police Advisory Board (Member LWV Wake County)

Cameron McEllihiney, Director of Training and Education, National Association for Citizen Oversight of Law Enforcement

In addition, we received advice and information from our sister Leagues to help us with our programs.

Melissa Currence, LWVUS Board of Directors

Ashley Raveche, LWV of California, Program Director Criminal Justice

Carolina Goodman, LWV of California, Criminal Justice Committee member

Mary Leopold, LWV of Metro St. Louis, Policing Study Group Chairman

We appreciate all of the support provided by the LWVNC Board of Directors especially the services of Andrea Cash

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