



January 13, 2020

Honorable Members of Council, thank you for your time this evening. My name is Kim Rolla. I am an 8th District resident, an attorney with the Legal Aid Justice Center's Civil Rights & Racial Justice Program, and a member of the Richmond Transparency and Accountability Project (RTAP). RTAP's goal is to build safer, healthier communities by disrupting mass incarceration at its source: police policies and procedures. We organize Black and brown people, legal experts, and policy analysts to achieve policing practices that reduce physical, economic, and emotional trauma on the most policed neighborhoods in the city.

We are here today because RPD has missed another opportunity to prove to the community that they are making a good faith effort to be transparent.

In June 2019, RTAP presented our report, "Our Streets, Our Says", to City Council. We described the alarming racial disparities in RPD data we had obtained through a two-year campaign: racial disparities in RPD's use of force, in who are the subjects of civilian complaints of police misconduct, in RPD's contact with pedestrians, and in who RPD is stopping in traffic stops. And we explained that RPD updating its records management system for the first time in over a decade -- an update that you as Councilors chose to fund -- provides a critical opportunity for community. Community members must have a say in the development of the system that will document those these very same RPD interactions with them. The community wants a data system that provides quality, publicly available data and does not implement the harmful practice of predictive policing, which uses potentially biased past crime data to predict where crime will occur in the future and proactively send more police to those areas.

RTAP presented in more detail at the next Public Safety Committee meeting and the Committee agreed that the RPD should host a public forum on the RMS. Chief Smith also agreed, stating: "We are committed to having public input... We are looking to do the public input August or September of this year... We welcome RTAP into that process."

RTAP has been at every public safety meeting since then -- in September, in October, and in November -- asking for that promise to be kept.

After RTAP spoke at the October Public Safety Committee meeting, RPD's IT Services Manager reached out to RTAP to invite us to a *private* meeting to discuss the RMS. But our ask has always been clear -- It has been for a *public* conversation. For that reason, we declined further private meetings with RPD.

At the November Public Safety Committee meeting, Chief Smith promised again to host a *public* forum, this time before the end of the year. Mayor Stoney's interim Chief Administrative Officer Lenora Reid reiterated that the public forum would occur before the end of the year and that RTAP would be invited.

Thus, we were *extremely* dismayed to learn that RPD held a "demonstration" of its Records Management System days before the Christmas holiday, without doing robust outreach to the community or advance notice or direct invitation to us, as promised by RPD.

Instead, *barely 24 hours* before the demonstration, information was posted without fanfare on RPD's website, sent via private email to press, and posted on Nextdoor (a private social network that has been critiqued for enabling racial profiling). The event was not announced on RPD's more widely circulated social media accounts. The approach to this demonstration -- 24 hour, extremely limited notice -- does not show a good faith effort on RPD's part.

RPD acknowledges the significant, undeniable racial disparities in stops. However, RPD, claims that these racial disparities are not concerning given that "officers are focusing on areas of the city where crime is occurring." RTAP strongly disagrees. However, RPD itself influences the crime pattern data that it claims justifies racial disparities in stops by how and where it chooses to deploy officers.

Meaningful public access to this policing data is as critical as ever.

At this point, we believe that Council must organize its own listening session on RPD's new records management system and policing in our City. RPD has demonstrated it will not do the work necessary to receive such input in good faith. A meaningful listening session will:

- Be recorded;
- Be held at a non-police facility;
- Provide the public at least 2 weeks' notice, including on City social media and websites;
- Include a question and answer period; and
- Solicit community priorities and concerns

This is a step towards RTAP's larger vision of a transparent and accountable police department. And a small step towards true safety: healthy and thriving communities for all Richmonders.

We look forward to continuing this long-term work with Council.