



Revisiting Community Policing

An overview of how MCPD can better engage and represent immigrant communities

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
About the Fellow	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Background Information	6
a. <i>What is Community Policing?</i>	6
b. <i>The Importance of Representation</i>	7
Methodology.....	8
Current Status in Montgomery County	9
a. <i>Population Demographics</i>	9
b. <i>Representation in MCPD</i>	10
c. <i>Community Policing</i>	12
d. <i>Other Community Engagement Efforts</i>	14
Research & Approaches in Other jurisdictions	16
a. <i>Other Community Engagement Efforts</i>	16
b. <i>Other Research</i>	17
Recommendations	18
a. <i>Outreach</i>	18
b. <i>Representation</i>	19
Racial Equity and Social Justice Statement	22
a. <i>Purpose of RESJ Statement</i>	20
b. <i>Purpose and Anticipated Impacts of Recommendations</i>	22
c. <i>Caveats</i>	23
Concluding Remarks	24

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ABOUT THE FELLOW



Grace is currently a graduate student at George Washington University pursuing a master's in public policy with a focus on international development, immigration, and foreign policy. This summer, she has been placed with the Montgomery County Police Department as a part of the County Council Summer Fellow Program. Before coming to DC, Grace earned her undergraduate degree in Government with double minors in Spanish and Latin American and Caribbean Studies from Dartmouth College. Over the years, Grace has demonstrated a commitment to bettering every community she is part of, passionate about the prospect of change and always working towards the bigger picture—something she hopes to carry over into her career in public service.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Montgomery County is one of the most diverse places in the country– with over 39 languages represented and 34% of the population foreign born. The Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) has demonstrated a commitment to serving its diverse community through innovative approaches to public safety and other community policing efforts. While the idea of community policing first came about at the turn of the century, there have been periods of increased pressure for police reform where agencies are brought back to community policing’s fundamental components (community partnership, organizational transformation, and problem-solving).

As law enforcement becomes an increasingly important part of the conversation around immigration, there is a growing call for police to improve engagement with immigrant communities. Most recently, the Police Executive Research Forum took up this very issue, publishing a series of recommendations on how to improve communication and outreach. After reviewing community policing and its implementation in Montgomery County, this paper makes the following recommendations: 1. Expand MCPD community liaison roles, 2. Increase languages available on emergency alert system, 3. Implement formal mentorship program, 4. Restructure multilingual pay program for officers, 5. Substitute work experience for college credit requirement to become a police officer, and 6. Advocate for DACA recipients to be eligible to become officers within the state of Maryland. Each recommendation aims to improve how MCPD engages and represents the communities they serve, especially the county’s growing foreign-born population.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of community policing has been around for nearly two decades. The Department of Justice first coined the term in 1994 to capture a new philosophy in law enforcement centered on prevention and community partnerships. Since then, police departments around the country have implemented some form of this philosophy. In the case of Montgomery County, the police department has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of prevention and outreach through education programs and youth initiatives. However, community policing was not intended to be confined to one division or position, but rather intended to be a shift in the way police operate and serve their communities.

The killing of George Floyd in 2020 reignited conversations around police reform and alternative ways to ensure public safety. Police departments nation-wide returned to many of the guiding components of “community policing” originally published in 1994. Like many, Montgomery County dedicated time and money to improve officer trainings and build-up alternative response units. The widespread social movement in 2020 brought a new vision of what public safety could and should look like. While MCPD has made commendable progress, time has shown that such change is slow and an ever-evolving process.

Law enforcement’s role in the community was brought to the forefront of national conversations again in late 2023 and early 2024. With the large influx of migrants crossing the US-Southern border, many states pushed the bounds of who could enforce immigration laws in the United States, looking to police forces to pick up where immigration forces fell short. An already strained relationship between the public and police became further strained, particularly among growing immigrant communities. This strain is felt not only in border states but in jurisdictions where police have never cooperated with Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) before. Montgomery County is no exception.

In light of the varied responses to who can enforce immigration law, the Police Executive Research Forum published a report on how law enforcement can better engage immigrant communities¹. The report highlighted ways to improve communication and interactions with residents and local organizations. It is no surprise that many of the recommendations in the report resemble the 20-year-old definition of “community policing.”

¹ Police Executive Research Forum, “How Law Enforcement Can Better Engage Immigrant Communities,” June 2024. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/EngageImmigrantCommunities.pdf>

Although MCPD has never partnered with immigration agencies, public perceptions remain tarnished by national coverage. Community policing remains more important than ever to restore trust in local law enforcement and ensure public safety.

The goal of this paper is to identify ways the Montgomery County Police Department can improve their community policing efforts. The remaining sections will look at existing community engagement efforts in the County and look to new research and other jurisdictions to see where possible changes can be made. The recommendations presented look at improvements in outreach and representation that apply to and extend beyond immigrant communities.

BACKGROUND

The following section provides the necessary background to understand the context for community policing throughout the country and within Montgomery County. Although police reform has been debated over the years, conversations gained more traction and urgency following the killing of George Floyd in 2020. The social movement following Floyd's death sparked a national debate around how policing should change and better meet the needs of the communities they serve— a conversation that continues today. The background highlights existing policing frameworks and pushes for representation.

A. What is community policing?

The Department of Justice established the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) in 1994 with the goal of disseminating grants and information to advance the practice of community policing. The office defined community policing as:

“. . . a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime².”

² Community Oriented Policing Services, “Community Policing Definition,” U.S. Department of Justice, 2012. <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/content.ashx/cops-p157-pub.pdf>

In contrast to other initiatives, community policing is centered on preventative measures to reduce crime and eliminate the fear often associated with law enforcement. Beyond the definition, community policing is broken into three components: community partnerships, organizational transformation, and problem solving. First, community partnerships aim to engage different organization and individual stakeholders within respective communities to solve problems and build trust. More recently, “community engagement” has been more frequently used to refer to this type of police work, further underscoring the importance of building relationships between community members and police officers. Second, organizational transformation refers to wide sweeping reform in the way law enforcement agencies are structured and managed. Some of their recommendations include recruiting personnel with a “call to service” and improving the implementation of information systems to enhance data collection and dissemination. Lastly, problem-solving affirms the importance of proactive measures across all operations to reduce crime, promoting innovative ways to keep communities safe. Within the final component, COPS provides the SARA framework (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment) that outlines how officers should identify and evaluate the best methods to address public safety threats. In many ways, COPS represented and continues to represent an evolving shift in how we administer public safety.

Despite the majority of agencies implementing some facet of community policing since the turn of the century, many elements remain central topics of discussion for police departments. It is evident the changes outlined by COPS not only take time to implement but they look very different across jurisdictions as well. The shortcomings of current community policing efforts serve as a reminder that “one size does not fit all.” At its core, community policing requires an understanding of and partnerships with the communities that are being served.

B. The Importance of Representation

In addition to a decades long push for community policing, there has been a growing awareness surrounding the lack of representation of women and diverse demographics in law enforcement agencies. The issue of representation coincides with the underlying community policing mission, aligning with the organizational transformation component that advocates for better hiring practices. In 2016, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) published a report on “Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement.” The report highlights the importance of

representation given the public-facing role of law enforcement and calls for representation of not only different races and gender but different religions, languages, sexual orientations, and other experiences as well. The EEOC explains:

“ . . . when members of the public believe their law enforcement organizations represent them, understand them, and respond to them - and when communities perceive authorities as fair, legitimate, and accountable - it deepens trust in law enforcement, instills public confidence in government, and supports the integrity of democracy. This trust is essential to defusing tension, to solving crimes, and to creating a system in which residents view law enforcement as fair and just³.”

The lack of representation in law enforcement agencies can largely be explained by recruitment and hiring. For example, additional criteria during the hiring process often disproportionately impacts underrepresented communities. Such criteria can include additional education required beyond a high school diploma or GED, serving as a barrier to entry for already underrepresented groups. In terms of the benefits of diversity, the EEOC discusses how the more representative the agency, the more likely they are to be open to reform and initiate systemic change.

Other initiatives in the world of law enforcement are pushing for diversity when it comes to gender. The 30x30 Initiative is committed to advancing women in the police force, with the goal of 30% of recruits being women by 2030⁴. The need for more women in the police force is a part of the broader discussion for law enforcement agencies to better reflect the communities they serve and protect.

METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This report began with a series of interviews with community leaders and county staff involved in racial equity and social justice, public schools, police department, and the history of Montgomery County. Many of the areas for improvement in community policing efforts were identified through these conversation and extensive research into the existing

³ U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, “Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement,” U.S. Department of Justice, October 2016. <https://www.eeoc.gov/advancing-diversity-law-enforcement>

⁴ 30x30 Initiative, “About.” <https://30x30initiative.org/about-30x30/>

community engagement programs throughout the county. Some of the guiding questions for these interviews are included below:

- What actors and departments in the County are working to build trust and establish relationships with immigrant communities?
- As policing changes, how will the role of police in the community evolve?
- How do we increase positive encounters with police to build trust with immigrant and historically marginalized communities?

By meeting with community members, I was able to get a better sense of the complexity and nuance when it comes to an issue like public safety. Following these interviews, I directed my research towards community policing efforts in other jurisdictions around the country. In addition to existing programs, I drew heavily from the Police Executive Research Forum’s recent study on law enforcement engagement with immigrant communities. Through this process, I was able to identify program and policy changes to improve outreach and representation in MCPD.

It is important to note that this research focuses heavily on relationships and how to build them within and outside of the police department. Therefore, the majority of the data comes from case studies and national reports compiled by experts in the field.

CURRENT STATUS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

The following section provides a breakdown of the current status of community policing and engagement in Montgomery County. To get a better picture, we look at population demographics and touch on community engagement efforts outside of MCPD as well. However, given the focus of this research, other community engagement efforts are not explained in depth.

A. Population Demographics

Montgomery County is one of the most diverse counties in the United States, home to people from all around the world. In fact, 34% of the population is foreign-born and 43% of residents speak a language other than English— including Spanish, French, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Amharic, and others. Table 1 showcases the

county’s demographics based on data from the 2020 Census⁵. It is important to remember that Montgomery County’s undocumented population is not reflected in the census data, and this population has only grown since 2020. The Migration Policy Institute estimated the unauthorized population in Montgomery County was 75,000 in 2019 using 2015-19 community survey⁶. The majority of the unauthorized population at the time was from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. However, recent migration trends have seen less migrants coming from the Northern Triangle with larger numbers coming from Venezuela and other countries⁷. Although not represented in Table 1, undocumented migrants remain an essential part of the policing and public safety discussion in Montgomery County.

Table 1

	Montgomery County (2020)	MCPD (2022)	Community Engagement Division (CED)
Total	1,062,061	1,181 (2022)	26 (2023)
White	43%	74%	18%
Black	19%	12%	57%
Hispanic	20.5%	9%	18%
Asian	15.4%	Not Reported*	Not Reported*
Male	51%	79%	60%
Female	49%	21%	40%
Foreign-Born	~34%	Not Reported*	Not Reported*

**With the most recent MCPD and CED data available, “Asian” and “Foreign-Born” were not included in the most recent reports on the CED’s and department’s personnel.*

B. Representation in MCPD

In addition to the population, Table 1 also shows the demographics of the Montgomery County Police Department from the MCPD Statistical Data Report in

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, “Montgomery County, Maryland,” 2020.

https://data.census.gov/profile/Montgomery_County,_Maryland?g=050XX00US24031#populations-and-people

⁶ Migration Policy Institute, “Profile of the Unauthorized Population: Montgomery County, MD,” 2019.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/county/24031>

⁷ John Gramlich, “Migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border hit a record high at the end of 2023,” Pew Research Center, February 2024.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/15/migrant-encounters-at-the-us-mexico-border-hit-a-record-high-at-the-end-of-2023/#:~:text=Nearly%2047%2C000%20migrant%20encounters%20in,involving%20Mexicans%20in%20December%202023>

January 2023⁸ and the Community Engagement Division (CED) in February 2022⁹. While the CED is more diverse, the department still struggles to reflect the demographics of the community. Furthermore, leadership positions in the department show greater discrepancies when it comes to representation. However, representation takes time and has been an ongoing priority for the Department. Over the years, the MCPD has made significant improvements in having a police force that represents the community they serve. The Department is a part of the 30x30 initiative to promote women in law enforcement; their commitment is demonstrated by the growing portion of female officers– now making up 21% of the county’s police force. In many ways, Montgomery County leads the way in female representation, with only 13% of officers being female across the country¹⁰. The Department has also made significant efforts to improve their recruitment through youth initiatives like the Cadet and Explorer program, exposing the community’s younger generations to potential careers in law enforcement. In addition to these programs, the county has improved recruitment efforts at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the area as well. The former Captain of the Training Division at MCPD, Nick Picerno, has begun to see the fruits of such efforts with more diverse and representative recruit classes coming through the Academy in recent years.

Another important part of “representation” in policing is the languages that are spoken by officers. Montgomery County poses a unique challenge given more than 39 different languages are spoken in the county. MCPD incentivizes officers that speak multiple languages by offering a pay differential to officers who know another language. Furthermore, the tuition assistance program offered through the department can be used to cover language classes in addition to paying for college. Right now, there are MCPD officers that speak a range of languages including Spanish, French, Amharic, French, German, Russian, Farsi, Tagalog, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean. Even though many languages are represented throughout the department, many officers still rely on language line

⁸ Montgomery County Department of Police, “Police Statistical Data Report,” January 2023. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/pol/Resources/Files/Annual-Reports/community-pol/MCPD_Annual_Statistical_Data_Report%20for%20CC_2022_FINAL_01312023_LD_saf_df.pdf

⁹ Montgomery County Department of Police, “Community Engagement Officer Program FAQ Document,” February 2022. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/pol/Resources/Files/CEO/MCPD-CEO-FAQ.pdf>

¹⁰ Veera Korhonen, “Gender distribution of full-time law enforcement employees in the United States in 2021,” Statista, July 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/195324/gender-distribution-of-full-time-law-enforcement-employees-in-the-us/>

services in situations where translation is needed. Language access remains a challenge to the county whose population is ever-changing and growing.

When discussing representation, it is also important to recognize that recent struggles in recruitment pose significant challenges to improving representation. MCPD and police departments across the country have seen significant drops in recruitment over recent years. In 2019, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) labeled it a “recruitment crisis,” pointing to a wide range of social, political, and economic forces as driving factors. The IACP specifically pointed to the declining public image of law enforcement, challenges in the hiring process, and even generational differences¹¹. The “recruitment crisis” was only exacerbated by the killing of George Floyd in 2020 and the social movement that followed. A survey by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) indicated that there was a 20.5% decrease in recruitment numbers during that year¹². While MCPD works to be more representative of the County, they are not immune to the challenges of recruitment and consequent labor shortages seen throughout the country.

C. Community Policing in Montgomery County

MCPD has repeatedly asserted the importance of community policing, stating that “community policing is the responsibility of every employee of the Department from the Chief down¹³.” As explained in the background, community policing comes down to three different components: community partnerships, organizational transformation, and problem-solving. All three components can be found within MCPD.

The first component of community partnerships is seen most prominently through the Community Engagement Division’s outreach (CED), community liaison committees, and civilian liaison staff. When it comes to the CED, their primary goal is to foster communication, transparency, and relationships with the community.

¹¹ International Association of Chiefs of Police, “A Crisis for Law Enforcement,” 2019.

https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416_IACP_RecruitmentBR_HR_0.pdf

¹² Police Executive Research Forum, “PERF Survey shows steady staffing decrease over the past two years,” 2021.

<https://www.policeforum.org/workforcemarch2022#:~:text=Hirings%20of%20new%20officers%20during,3.9%25%20lower%20than%20in%202019>

¹³ Montgomery County Department of Police, “MCPD Community Policing Efforts FAQs,” p. 4.

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/pol/Resources/Files/CommunityEngagement/MCPD-and-the-Community_052021.pdf

Some of their outreach efforts include but is not limited to drug education and prevention. In addition to their educational programs, they also partner with the county's Health and Human Services and non-profits to better serve and connect with community members. Beyond the CED, a major part of the MCPD community partnerships are the Latino Liaison Committee and the African American Liaison Committee that bring community leaders into the fold of discussions surrounding public safety.



Mariela Leon,
MCPD Hispanic Community
Liaison

However, when considering community engagement with immigrant communities, the Hispanic Community Liaison within the Media & Public Information Office of the Department plays a central role. The position, now held by Mariela Leon, aims to educate residents on the resources and programs offered by MCPD and other organizations throughout the County. While the title says "Hispanic," Leon often describes herself as "everyone's liaison." Through her work, Leon connects with not only community leaders but residents from all backgrounds and languages. Right now, Leon serves as the only police liaison in a county with a population exceeding one million. And like many community engagement roles, Leon often takes on the

role of case manager given the personal relationships she has developed with individuals in the community. The relationships built by CED efforts, community liaison committees, and Leon's work are at the core of MCPD's community partnerships.

The second component of community policing is organizational transformation. Two prime examples of this component are the reinstatement of the Community Engagement Division in 2016 and the county's Advisory Commission on Policing that was created in 2019. According to COPS, the goal of organizational transformation is to align the "management, structure, personnel, and information systems to support community partnerships and proactive problem solving¹⁴." The

¹⁴ Community Oriented Policing Services, "Community Policing Definition," U.S. Department of Justice, p. 4, 2012.

creation of the Advisory Commission on Policing includes community leaders in discussions concerning public safety, inherently supporting the community partnerships in place and promoting transparency. Beyond these two examples, changes in training and recruitment are also central to the organizational transformations MCPD has undergone.

Even though MCPD has enacted many organizational changes, one area where they run into logistical challenges is their emergency alert system. Right now, the emergency messaging system is only offered in English and Spanish. While these are the most common languages in the county, it does point to an area where current practices could be improved to better reach different communities in the county by expanding the languages that are available.

Lastly, the third component of “problem-solving” points to innovative and revised approaches to certain public safety issues. Like other areas of community policing, Montgomery County has been at the frontlines of exploring different ways to keep people safe. The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) ran by MCPD and HHS is one example of an innovative approach to public safety. The CIT provides a better response to behavioral calls that brings together mental health and addiction professionals, providing individuals struggling with mental illness or addiction the help they need. In more recent innovations, the County has invested in a drone first-responder program that gives officers more information about a situation before entering the scene, improving efficiency and decreasing likelihood of police escalating a situation. Both programs serve as example of innovative ways to solve public safety problems.

This is not a complete outline of MCPD’s community policing efforts but rather an overview of the department-wide changes that have already been implemented.

D. Other Community Engagement Efforts

It is important to recognize that community engagement extends far beyond MCPD and is found throughout the county within different departments and non-profit partnerships. In many ways, community engagement is an inherent part of local government rests on the continued outreach to the people they serve. Beyond other government offices and agencies, non-profits in Montgomery County provide extensive services to residents, especially migrants. MCPD’s community engagement efforts would not be possible without the work already being done by

many of the local organizations. Some of the main actors in Montgomery County include:

- Office of Community Partnerships (OCP)
- Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center
- Montgomery Public Schools (MPS)
- Street Outreach Network (SON)
- Identity
- CASA

**This is not an extensive list of offices involved in community engagement in Montgomery County*

Many of the departments and non-profits above overlap and work together in their community engagement efforts, connecting constituents with and providing them the resources and support they need. Within the Office of Community Partnership, six different liaisons are staffed and tasked with strengthening relationship between government and communities in need. Mariela Leon, the Hispanics Community Liaison with MCPD, often works with these organizations during community events, finding ways for police to build some of those same relationships with community members. Across all the different actors in Montgomery County, MCPD included, effective community engagement often rides on the relationships built and maintained between county government and community members. While the county offers a multitude of services to its residents, such efforts often struggle to meet the demand that has only grown in recent years.

RESEARCH AND APPROACHES IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

The following section draws from recent reports published by the Center for Policing Equity (CPE) and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), and new community policing programs implemented in other jurisdictions. The reports and case studies highlighted below provide insight into ways to enhance the community policing philosophy.

A. Other Community Engagement Efforts

The Center for Policing Equity and Yale’s Justice Collaboratory published a 5-step policy plan that reiterates and reframes the guiding components to public safety, advocating for actions that “invest in building trust and legitimacy in the system as a whole¹⁵.” In many ways, the plan reflects the steps already being taken by MCPD and other police departments to work towards a holistic approach to public safety and invest in community relationships. However, CPE goes a step further by underscoring the importance of community development and reconciliation. This goal reframes the way in which structural changes to policing are often discussed, calling on law enforcement agencies to directly confront past trauma and engage in reconciliatory initiatives. While the policy plan is framed in a national context, it still serves as a reminder of the need to directly address the issues that undermine police legitimacy and community trust.

When it comes to historically marginalized groups, law enforcement must address past trauma. In many ways, immigrant communities are no different; however, previous trauma often comes from experiences in their home country that fuel mistrust with law enforcement¹⁶. As immigration levels continue to rise, tension between law enforcement and immigration forces have only increased. Even jurisdictions that have never cooperated with immigration forces, are still met with mistrust among immigrant communities.

In June of 2024, the Police Executive Research Forum took up this topic by holding a national survey and conducting regional meetings around the topic of “How Law

¹⁵ Phillip Atiba Goff et al, “Re-imagining public safety: Prevent harm and lead with the truth,” Center for Policing Equity and the Justice Collaboratory Yale Law School, p. 2. <https://policingequity.org/national-action-plans/37-cpe-toolkit-reimagining-public-safety-policy-plan/file>

¹⁶ Police Executive Research Forum, “How Law Enforcement Can Better Engage Immigrant Communities,” June 2024.

Enforcement Can Better Engage Immigrant Communities.” After meeting with several jurisdictions with large immigrant populations, PERF created a framework to improve trust and communication with immigrant communities. Many of the recommendations listed deal with youth outreach, improved training, and community partnerships.

However, beyond the more streamlined community policing recommendations, PERF also recommended several personnel changes: 1. Start a refugee liaison position and 2. Hire more refugees and migrants as officers. Like any historically marginalized group, representation plays an integral role in improving the trust and legitimacy of the police department. These personnel changes have already been made in some states, for example, the Rochester Police Department in New York has started a refugee liaison position. Moses Robinson, a former Rochester patrol and school resource officer, now works as a community liaison to the New American/refugee community. In his position, he works directly with the city’s New American Advisory Council as well as many refugee resettlement agencies in the area.

In addition to the liaison position, Illinois passed a law making it legal for DACA recipients (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) to become police officer in December 2023¹⁷. This change in the citizenship requirement to become a police officer comes at a time when departments nation-wide are facing labor shortages and working to improve representation.

For Montgomery County, changing the citizenship requirement to become an officer would happen at the state level but hiring a refugee liaison could be a more realistic solution at the county level for improving police engagement with immigrant communities.

B. Other Research

Beyond PERF’s recommendations to better engage with immigrant communities, there are other programs being implemented to improve community policing more generally.

¹⁷ JB Pritzker, “Illinois bill will allow non-citizens to become police officers,” NBC Chicago, December 2023. <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-politics/illinois-bill-will-allow-non-citizens-to-become-police-officers/3303881/>

For instance, mentorship programs are often a part of youth initiatives and recruitment efforts but there are fewer programs that continue in higher levels of police departments. When thinking about representation, it is something that should be seen at all levels of a law enforcement agency and not primarily in more entry-level ranks. In October 2023, the IACP published an article outlining action items to promote racial and gender diversity in police leaders. The article cited mentoring as an effective way to “mitigate race- and ethnicity-related disparities in organizational justice and other contextual factors.” They explain that the presence of mentors can motivate members to pursue promotions and foster a deeper commitment to the organization and its mission¹⁸. Within higher levels, majority of existing mentorship is organic and natural. And while data shows this type of mentoring may be more effective it creates space for inequity where individuals may not receive the same opportunities. According to the IACP, formal mentorship programs administered in an organizational setting are more effective than none at all. Right now, the New York State Police are working towards this type of organizational transformation by implementing a formal mentorship program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated, community policing is an evolving process that is revised and improved as new policing approaches are developed and communities change. While Montgomery County has implemented the community policing philosophy in many ways, there are still changes that can be made to better represent and serve the community. The following section outlines six different policy recommendations that fall into “Outreach” and “Representation.”

A. Outreach Recommendations

#1 Expand MCPD Community Liaison Role: Montgomery County should expand MCPD’s Hispanic Community Liaison role to better meet the needs of all its residents. Right now, Mariela Leon serves as the liaison to the entire county and her title is targeted at Spanish-speaking residents. Below are three potential ways the County can expand and better support Leon’s community liaison role for MCPD.

¹⁸ Robert E. Worden et al, “Charting a Path toward Racial and Gender Diversity among Police Leaders,” *Police Chief*, International Association of Chiefs of Police, p. 28-31, October 2023.

- I. Ideally, Montgomery County should hire a Hispanic Community Liaison in every policing district. However, there are logistical challenges to expand from 1 to 6 different positions, priority should be given to policing districts with larger immigrant and Spanish-speaking populations.
- II. Similar to Rochester PD, MCPD should hire an additional community liaison that is targeted at Refugees and New Americans. While Spanish is the second most spoken language in the county, the experiences of many migrants and refugees require an intentional engagement strategy by the police department.
- III. Lastly, MCPD should change the title of Hispanic Community Liaison to better reflect the current scope of work being done by Mariela Leon. For her and many community members, she is “everybody’s liaison,” often working with residents who speak languages other than Spanish. The title should better reflect the actual work occurring on-the-ground.

#2 Increase Languages available on Emergency Alert System: As mentioned before, Montgomery County’s current emergency alert system is only offered in English and Spanish. While there are logistical challenges to offering every language spoke in the county, the alert system should be expanded to offer the five most common languages: English, Spanish, French, Chinese, Korean, and Amharic*¹⁹.

**Most recent census data does not specify what African languages are most common in the county. Amharic is one of several African languages that are spoken and is frequently requested in the Hispanic Community Liaison Role given the large Ethiopian population.*

B. Representation Recommendations

#3 Implement Formal Mentorship Program: Mentorship is currently a part of the Cadet and Explorer programs aimed exposing high school and college-aged students to careers in law enforcement, however, mentorship once becoming a police officer is solely informal. MCPD should implement a mentorship program that ensures a systematic approach to providing support and role models for officers from all backgrounds. By implementing a formal mentorship program, it would likely strengthen commitment to the department and public service mission.

¹⁹ Montgomery Planning, “Languages Spoken at home by Montgomery County residents,” 2000.
https://www.montgomeryplanning.org/research/data_library/population/po39.shtm

#4 Restructure Multilingual Pay Program: As the current multilingual pay program operates, officers receive the same differential regardless of how many languages they speak. Right now, the pay differential is only tiered based on the officer’s language proficiency, broken down in the follow: basic is \$1/hour, advanced is \$2/hour, and expert is \$3/hour. The existing pay program structure is shown in the first two columns of Table 2 below. By restructuring the pay differential to factor in how many languages an officer can speak, the department would provide more incentive among officers to learn more languages and take advantage of available funding for language classes (shown in highlighted column of Table 2). For instance, officers who speak two languages in addition to English could qualify for the same differential as “advanced” speakers, and those who speak more than 3 could qualify for the same differential as “expert” speakers. While many languages are already represented in the department, that does not mean they are widely accessible in every situation that may require translation.

Table 2

Pay Differential	Proficiency Level	Languages Spoken
\$1/hour	Basic	Or 2
\$2/hour	Advanced	Or 3
\$3/hour	Expert	Or 4+

#5 Expand Exceptions to College Education Requirement to Become an Officer: Montgomery County’s college credit requirement to become an officer exceeds state standards, requiring 60 college credits. Recently, the County has made an exception to candidates with military experience. MCPD should expand the exceptions to include 3-5 years of work experience on a case-by-case basis. If candidates can demonstrate the proper writing critical thinking skills required as an officer, they should be eligible to apply. This could take the form of a written exam during the application or training process. The current college education requirement presents a barrier to entry for many individuals from already underrepresented groups. By considering work experience on a case-by-case basis, the department would increase the likelihood of having a more representative class of recruits.

#6 Advise the Maryland State Government to allow DACA Recipients to Become an Officer: Montgomery County should call on the state of Maryland to allow DACA recipients to become police officers. Current Maryland state law requires applicants to be a U.S. citizen; however, states like Illinois have recently passed legislation to permit non-citizens with work authorization (DACA recipients) to become officers. This legislation passed in light of officer shortages faced across the country– other states are looking to make the same changes to their officer requirements. Montgomery County Council can advocate for a similar legislation by pushing for the change in conversations with state legislators and/or sending a formal letter to the Maryland House of Delegates and Senate.

RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE (RESJ) STATEMENT

A. Purpose of RESJ Statement

The purpose of RESJ impact statement for these community policing recommendations is to evaluate their anticipated impact on racial equity and social justice in the County. Racial equity and social justice refer to a process that focuses on centering the needs, power, and leadership of communities of color and low-income communities with a goal of eliminating racial and social inequities.²⁰ Achieving racial equity and social justice usually requires seeing, thinking, and working differently to address the racial and social harms that have caused racial and social inequities.²¹ In many ways, these goals are intertwined with the core of the community policing philosophy.

B. Purpose and Anticipated Impacts of Representation and Outreach Recommendations

The purpose of the community policing recommendations outlined in this paper is to improve the ways MCPD engages and represents not only immigrant communities but other historically marginalized groups in the county as well. The outreach recommendations provide actionable steps for MCPD to restructure and strengthen how they communicate with and educate the public about their work. The representation recommendations highlight areas where the department can implement changes to ensure officers at all levels better reflect those in the community. In line with the goal of community policing and racial equity frameworks, these suggestions provide tangible ways to take a more equitable approach to public safety, from changing who has a seat at the table to what languages are being represented throughout the department. Ultimately, these recommendations mark a shift in priorities with law enforcement agencies, a shift in which MCPD has already been leading the way in the policing world.

²⁰ Definition of racial equity and social justice adopted from “Applying a Racial Equity Lens into Federal Nutrition Programs” by Marlysa Gamblin, et.al. Bread for the World, and from Racial Equity Tools <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>.

²¹ Ibid

C. Caveats

The major caveat with these recommendations and their RESJ impact comes down to the limitations in representing every language and community that resides in Montgomery County. As mentioned before, there are financial and logistical implications to offering the emergency alert system in every language spoken in the county. Similarly, expanding the Hispanic Community Liaison role, while important, does not capture the community's range of cultures, languages, identities, and experiences that are represented. Furthermore, there are other limitations when considering the lack of data surrounding community policing given the more recent push for data-driven processes and relationship-based nature of these changes. While the recommendations are not comprehensive, they are a necessary step in the direction towards a more equitable and representative approach to public safety.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this paper is not to negate the progress that MCPD has accomplished but rather urge the Department and county to continue pushing the needle on how they represent and serve the community. The DOJ's community policing philosophy provides a framework of standards and programs we should aim to implement among our agencies that serve as an important face of local government. As migration continues and our communities continue to evolve, our law enforcement agencies must continue to adapt and look for innovative programs and initiatives.

When looking for innovative solutions to both new and longstanding public safety issues, there will not always be the same data available. At the core of this research and resulting recommendations is relationships—relationships between the police department and community members and leaders. While relationships can be hard to quantify, it does not diminish their importance in discussions and decisions surrounding public safety. The conversations about how to keep our communities safe become more productive and impactful when they are rooted in partnership and include the people they impact most. And in order to include all community members in the conversation, there must be better outreach and representation.

Like the rest of the country, Montgomery County is a community of immigrants. The immigrant community adds to the vibrancy and diversity that have come to define the county and it is the role of law enforcement and the county government to ensure they are included and considered throughout the policy and implementation process.