



Town Manager
Office of the Selectboard
PO Box 730
67 Main Street
Stowe, VT 05672

July 30, 2020

Dear House Government Operations & Judiciary Committees,

Thank you for your willingness to take testimony on your important work on police reform and ensuring marginalized groups have a voice.

There has been considerable discussion regarding oversight to ensure the *police are not policing themselves*. Voters in a number of communities in Vermont have chosen the Council / Manager Form of Government. Under this form of government, the elected Selectboard provides oversight of the municipal corporation and hires an apolitical professional manager to oversee the day-to-day administration, including personnel administration. 24 VSA Chapter 37 also stipulates the Town, City or Village Manager shall *have charge, control and supervision of the police department and shall appoint and may remove the officers thereof and shall fix their salaries* 24 VSA 1236 (9) (A). Professional administrators with the assistance of legal council have the professional training to effectively protect the rights of citizens and public sector employees if appropriate support is provided. If advisory committees are created, it is important that the Manager retain the authority to hire, discipline and fire municipal employees to ensure that it is in conformance with the form of government the citizens have chosen and so it is done in a manner that minimizes legal liability.

With this being said, municipalities could use financial assistance and support to help fulfill our oversight role and therefore I offer the following:

It would be helpful to have a State accreditation process or some type of *audit* of police agencies on a periodic basis to help provide confidence in them and to see where improvements should be made. Much in the same way having an independent audit firm look at our handling municipal finances helps build public confidence and provide recommendations on how to improve our internal controls. An accreditation or audit could evaluate police procedures and make recommendations on areas to improve them to reflect best practices, review case files to ensure they are being handled appropriately, and monitor arrest statistics to help ensure fair and non-discriminatory practices. An accreditation process could include those trained in law enforcement and those that may have a broader perspective, such as human rights.

It is important that the municipal governments have access to the State police or other qualified parties to handle investigations involving use of force or discrimination to help ensure that people feel that an independent look has been done.

It is imperative that funding be provided for mental health professionals and the police agencies have access to them in a timely manner. Also, it is crucial that there is adequate treatment and housing available for those with mental health issues.

It is increasingly difficult to attract and retain qualified officers. It is particularly important to attract a diversified workforce into law enforcement to assure a broad-based perspective. Perhaps it is worth considering a signing bonus or some other financial incentive in order to help do so.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Charles Safford
Stowe Town Manager