



Seattle Women's Commission

October 15, 2010

Police Chief John Diaz
Seattle Police Department
P.O. Box 34986
Seattle, WA 98124-4986

Dear Chief Diaz,

In light of the recent high-profile incidences involving police officers, we were pleased to hear that you will be examining whether current police officer training is adequate and appropriate. We believe this presents an excellent opportunity to examine training of Seattle police officers more broadly.

The role of the Seattle Women's Commission and the Seattle LGBT Commission is to effectively identify and recommend policy, legislation, programs and budget items concerning women and the LGBT community in Seattle to the Mayor, City Council and City departments. In response to community members who approached the Women's Commission in 2009, we have spent the last year looking into reports of how officers handle domestic violence incidents. We continue to hear informal reports from people in the community that the way officers handle domestic violence incidences is not always according to department policy or best practices.

Some areas that we urge you to examine include:

- How officers respond to domestic violence calls involving people who have limited English skills and who are officers using as translators on the scene. For example, do officers understand and abide by the policy that they must always use the language translation line and not ask children or neighbors to translate?
- Whether officers are using best practices in the field for training around culturally competent response to domestic violence. For example, how does an officer handle an incident where a female victim is not comfortable speaking or making eye contact with a male officer? Is training specific to different cultures so officers understand the nuances?
- Whether officers know how to handle the complexities of domestic violence incidents involving transgendered individuals. Have you compared your department's practices in this area to national best practices, such as those in the enclosed report?
- Whether a heterosexual bias may play a role when assessing a domestic violence situation between same-gendered or transgender couples. For example, while sexual orientation is not an issue for heterosexual couples, for some LGBT couples, one person in the relationship may not be "out" to family or coworkers and the abusive partner may be using manipulation or threats of outing to coerce the other against his or her will.
- Providing training on the ways that domestic violence affects LGBT couples differently in terms of 1) privacy as one person in the relationship may not be out, 2) there are few shelters or safe houses where battered men, women or transgendered people feel comfortable due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, 3) leaving a same-sex or transgendered partner may mean financial upheaval as LGBT people may not have a designated process to assist in the even distribution of assets.

We believe the quality of training a police officer receives and the culture of the department are two of the strongest indicators of an excellent police force. We encourage you to take a holistic look at how your new officers are trained to respond to a variety of calls, as well as whether ongoing training opportunities are sufficient. This is especially important for officers that have a mentoring role during probationary field training of new officers.

The Seattle Women's Commission was pleased to see your presence at the Domestic Violence Awareness Month Awards Reception and enjoyed hearing your words. While we do not doubt that your department does excellent work in many circumstances, we hope the department will work harder to extend its commitment to all population affected by domestic violence and ensure that your officers are well trained on the department policies.

We look forward to forging a partnership with you and your department to work toward a strong and well-trusted Seattle police force. Thank you for your service to our city.

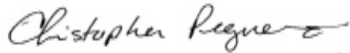
Sincerely,



Abigail Echo-Hawk, Co-Chair
Seattle Women's Commission



Jamila Johnson, Co-Chair
Seattle Women's Commission



Christopher Peguero, Co-Chair
Seattle LGBT Commission



Lillie Cridland, Co-Chair
Seattle LGBT Commission

cc: Mike McGinn, Mayor
Capt. Steve Brown
Seattle City Council