

Remarks by CPC Interim Executive Director Cali Ellis, PhD

March 1, 2023

This year is incredibly important for the City of Seattle. After the shooting of woodcarver John T. Williams by the Seattle Police Department in 2010, 34 organizations signed onto a letter to bring the Department of Justice to Seattle. The community has been working with the federal government for over 11 years. Now is the time to bring this responsibility back to us – our community here in Seattle.

The Community Police Commission is important because everyone in the city of Seattle needs, as our governing ordinance states, “effective, constitutional policing and a police department that has the trust, respect, and support of the community.” The CPC has a vital role to play in ensuring police accountability in our city. It provides important analysis and policy recommendations that are meant to ensure the integrity of our law enforcement system, one in which police officers are entrusted with extraordinary life-and-death powers.

In 2017, the community and city leaders working together made a strong system of civilian oversight of policing part of the laws that govern this city. This system was thoughtfully designed to incorporate community input to build a strength that other cities struggled with in their own civilian oversight systems by including “the voice and values of the community that is being policed.” These voices may not always be the loudest, but it is our charge as the CPC to learn from them. These voices may not speak English as we do, or want to speak in front of

crowds, or even – such as young children - be able to voice their needs and values. But it is our job at the Community Police Commission – spelled out in our governing ordinance - to learn about the values and interests of all communities, not just the loudest ones.

The city of Seattle is hurting. The most recent crime report shows that violent crime has increased. Homicides have increased by 24% over 2021, while rapes and aggravated assaults have increased almost 5% in the same time. There have been 10 homicides in Seattle so far in 2023 - 10 lives lost to violence, each of which was precious and valuable in their own humanity. In South Lake Union, Downtown, Mount Baker, Georgetown, Rainier Valley, Wallingford, and Ballard, few parts of the city have been spared from the tragic effects of violence, just this year. Effective, constitutional policing is one critical component of safety for these communities.

Not all communities are affected in the same way by this violence. I volunteer with victims of domestic violence, and they need effective, constitutional policing to protect themselves and their families from violent abuse – while human services support systems are critical to helping survivors recover from the effects of trauma, what systems – what people - are there to stop a violent partner from physically attacking again? No one deserves to be victimized by the police, and no one deserves to be victimized by those who wish to do them harm. This system was developed to help the community as a whole bring the strengths and legal authority of constitutional policing to protect the entire community – including victims of violence.

This is why the Community Police Commission is so important. Our guiding document is the ordinance that established the CPC pursuant to the federal consent decree in 2012. The ordinance ensured that the Commission's composition must include representatives from every corner of the city and reflect Seattle's diverse population, with members drawn from different economic, racial and ethnic groups.

The ordinance also stipulates that each Commissioner must have a reputation for integrity and professionalism, a firm commitment to responsible and responsive law enforcement and an ability to work with others to achieve its objectives.

Chief among these is the goal of ensuring public confidence in the effectiveness and professionalism of the Seattle Police Department. The CPC is specifically charged with engaging the community to develop recommendations regarding the police accountability system and provide a community-based perspective on law enforcement-related policies, practices and services.

My goals as interim executive director are to make CPC a functional, resilient organization that can fulfill this statutory role. To this end, we need to be fully staffed to engage all of Seattle's diverse communities effectively. With their input, we will be effective and reliable policy advocates at the city, county and state levels. In my new role, I'm committed to enhancing public trust in the CPC by implementing evidence-based approaches to our work that

incorporate best practices from other civilian oversight organizations across the country while respecting the distinct voices of the Seattle community.

I will work closely with the CPC Commissioners and staff to bring the community together using the requirements set forth in our ordinance. I would add that it is also critical that we rebuild trust with our partners – the Office of Police Accountability, the Office of Inspector General and the Seattle Police Department – as well as our elected officials and community leaders.

I'm incredibly optimistic about our future and our ability to bring meaningful change. To do that, I believe we must work toward a broad and deep definition of community – and value and support one another.

We all care about justice. We wouldn't be doing this challenging work if we didn't. And sometimes we get caught up in our perspectives and points of view and fail in showing our respect and care for one another. Valuing community and supporting one another are the stated goals of the City and ones that we too are working towards every day. The city's Racial and Social Justice Initiative speaks to the sustainability of by centering the health and wellbeing of those most impacted by the history of racism, stating that "Far from a checklist, anti-racism is an orientation, to ourselves and the world, which we nourish and grow through our daily actions and reflections."

Our daily actions and reflections as board members and staff of the CPC will help guide us in our important work in the coming years. At some point, the city will be ready to move beyond the Consent decree. When it does, we must have a civilian oversight system ready to step up and play its role. I pledge to do my utmost to gain your trust and confidence, and I look forward to joining with you to help make Seattle a safer and more vibrant city for all its residents.