CITY OF ATLANTA



Atlanta Citizen Review Board (ACRB)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EDITORIAL COMMENTS:

ACRB Executive Director, Lee Reid Speaks Out on Chiefs Responses to Citizen Complaints

Last week, the Atlanta City Council Public Safety Committee voted to send the proposed ACRB ordinance changes to a Public Safety work session. Despite many months of preparation, meetings and communication invested by the ACRB staff and board related to the proposed changes, and requests for feedback on the changes, the Public Safety Committee decided that some stakeholders still needed more time to consider the changes. The ACRB welcomes the opportunity to receive input and feedback from the affected stakeholders.

One of the most significant challenges facing the ACRB is the Atlanta Police Department's lack of discipline on ACRB sustained complaints (complaints filed by citizens, discussed and reviewed by the ACRB and deemed credible or true based on evidence obtained by experienced investigators). While that in itself is a major criticism of the APD, the failure to provide a response that has a legal or factual basis for the disagreements compounds, frustrates and weakens the intent of the ACRB ordinance.

The ACRB ordinance was created to help foster a better understanding between citizens and officers, and increase the level of accountability and transparency within the City's officer accountability mechanism. The reasonable and measured approach of the proposal to require the chiefs of police and corrections to provide greater detailed responses to ACRB sustained complaints benefits all stakeholders – citizens, elected officials, community groups, police and corrections, and the ACRB.

It is critical to community trust-building and individual and organizational accountability that the Board and citizens understand how and why the chiefs make their decisions on misconduct cases. A detailed response letter on ACRB sustained complaints would alert the ACRB to any investigative issues, allow the ACRB and citizens to gain a better understanding of the departments' discipline philosophy, and create additional opportunities for more constructive dialogue on officer accountability that will benefit citizens and officers.

This proposed change to the ordinance does not affect the chiefs' ability or authority to make disciplinary decisions as deemed appropriate for the management of their respective departments. However, with the enormous power granted to the departments with the ability to justifiably take freedom and life, an expectation and requirement for justification of decisions on misconduct complaints is a very reasonable request. While the ACRB and the law enforcement departments may never be in total tandem on every disciplinary decision, as partners in officer accountability, clear understandings and clear avenues for discussion of disciplinary decisions should be an expectation of departments committed to officer accountability, transparency, and better community/officer relations.

The ordinance changes, if adopted, will strengthen the relationship between the ACRB, the Police Department and the residents of Atlanta. The recommendations will lay a foundation that will help ensure transparency of decision making and assure citizens that their police complaints have been thoroughly investigated, seriously evaluated, and impartially considered.

The work and progress of the ACRB has been accomplished through the unwavering commitment of the ACRB staff and board members who have dedicated themselves to fairly investigate and adjudicate the complaints. Our highest priority has always been to treat parties without bias and in the most respectful manner.

I am proud of the work that the ACRB staff and board members have done to provide the residents of Atlanta efficient and effective police oversight. I also look forward to working with the Atlanta Police Department and Atlanta Department of Corrections in the pursuit of fostering better relations with the Board and citizenry.

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