

Newly Appointed Atlanta Chief of Police Erika Shields Answers Questions from the Atlanta Citizen Review Board

ACRB January Board Meeting held at Atlanta City Hall
January 12, 2017

ACRB MEMBERS

SHERRY WILLIAMS (*Chair/Williams*)
PAUL BARTELS (*Secretary/Bartels*)
BILL BOZARTH (*Bozarth*)
GERALD SOUDER (*Vice Chair/Souder*)
TRACEE MCDANIEL (*McDaniel*)

CECILIA HOUSTON-TORRENCE (*Torrence*)
WILLIAM HARRISON (*Harrison*)
GINO BROGDON (*Brogdon*)
HAROLD HARDNETT (*Hardnett*)
SHUNTAY PITRE (*Pitre*)

Q&A with Chief Shields and ACRB Members:

1. **(Harrison)** *Congratulations on your new appointment. Also, I would like to commend you on maintaining the community partners group. I think that is an intricate part of what we are all trying to do with the ACRB with that particular advisory committee, because I serve on that committee. What is your vision for that particular advisory group?*
2. **(Chief Shields)** *My goal and my expectation of the commanders are that they have dialogue with people and meet with the committees on a regular basis and that they are receptive to the feedback. I think that's where sometimes law enforcement comes up short. I have some very decent and good commanders who want to do the right thing. So, if you feel somehow the advisory board is not coming up; not meeting your expectation then, I need to hear that.*
3. **(Williams)** *What will you do to get officers off the streets that have numerous sustained complaints against them? One of the examples that a lot of people like to cite...I don't remember the names in the case, but this was something that was publicized within the past year. There was an officer who actually shot through an automobile and killed the person and later it came out later that he had numerous complaints against him from several years. Had he been taken off the streets, this individual would not have been killed. Do you guys remember the names and when it happened?*
4. **(Hardnett)** *I believe that the guy was pulling out from an apartment complex or something.*
5. **(Williams)** *He chased after him and he gunned him down. This is just an example of an officer having numerous complaints and perhaps should have been pulled off the streets earlier.*
6. **(Chief Shields)** *The officer that I am thinking of, he did not have numerous complaints in any way that indicated he used excessive force. This is where you delineate if someone has failure to appear; or someone having auto accidents if they can't drive. So merely having numerous complaints would not necessarily warrant that they should not be a police officer. They are having multiple complaints issues where they can't drive, then, I need to have them on the foot beat. If they are having multiple complaints where there is courtesy complaints, then they need to go back to the academy and have to sit through essentially customer service training and get on a performance improvement plan where the supervisor tracks their progress. I would hope that if we have someone who is showing or exhibiting a pattern of use of force, we can sustain it. We struggle with that in the past. I worked ten years ago in Internal Affairs and it can be very difficult. Sometimes we would have a case where you knew an employee had used excessive force and you simply could not prove it. You could not sustain it sufficiently. That's going to change with body cameras. I really believe that body cameras...for multiple reasons are really going to be law enforcement new best friend. We are going to take some hits, but I believe that it will be a behavior modifier and we*

will get some of these folks weeded out; previously we could not. If there is an employee who has multiple use of force complaints; whether sustained or not, yes, that person warrants closer examination because there is a reason there's a pattern. Merely having numerous complaints... well again not ideal, it could be a series of things. It could be that as a new officer, they failed to fill out the right proper form; they had a vehicle accident and they arrive to work late once. While that is not again ideal, that person can still be a valuable employee. If the person that we're describing in the case you mentioned, I would say on that shooting...and it's still open, so I will thread carefully here, it generally caught folks off guard. It was not considered an employee who is a problem employee. It is so difficult when you're hiring folks to gauge them.

7. **(Bozarth)** *Congratulation for your new position. We see a lot on our Ride-Along; we talk to officers...we see a lot of turn-over in ranks, especially among the officers with only a few years on the force. In tonight's cases...and there are only four cases. There are three officers that were complained against that aren't with you anymore. So, I know that you have a tremendous challenge losing people too soon and we know some of the reasons for that. I represent Neighbor Planning Units and the questions keep coming to me...we don't think that's good and nobody likes that. How can we support you in the process; at least that can be done outside of the department, to cut down on the bad turnover challenges that you have?*
8. **(Chief Shields)** *Yes. It is an issue. I am sure that you all have read that it is an issue in the large cities nationwide. With the uptick in the economy, what you saw were agencies that previously had hiring freezes. When they went to the hiring freezes, large departments; well-trained departments are ideal areas these agencies want to pick from. We have already invested the time and money, training the person; they prove that they are capable of policing in big cities. What you will find is the agencies come in and recruit from us and after Ferguson, when so much light was put on agencies that had never made any effort to diversify, Atlanta was very appealing. We had a high number of African American employees who were highly trained and they left the department. We are struggling with that. Now you throw into it what transpired the last year. Where we have had these horrible incidents come out where police portrayed, rightly so, in a really poor light; exercising dreadful judgment and you also have police get executed doing the job. It's a hard problem to sell. What can we do to keep the folks? I will coordinate with the Atlanta Police Foundation and do a very detailed case study to present to all mayoral candidates. Because the end of the day, we will have to be more competitive in that space. We've made huge strides. This last year, Mayor Reed's administration really bumped up salaries and put us in a competitive space. We also are seeing that we are competing against so many agencies that we were not previously. I hope that the mayoral candidates will buy into and endorse this four-year pay plan so that we can be on the track to retain talent trainees.*
9. **(Hardnett)** *I know that the Mayor would like to have 2000 active members on the police force. How close are we to that number?*
10. **(Chief Shields)** *Right about now, and I did check today, I think that we have about 140 vacancies. We are working diligently. We are working with the Atlanta Police Foundation to help with marketing and recruiting; people who actually do that professionally to help us doing this stage. If you have referrals, I will take them.*
11. **(Brogdon)** *Chief Shields, thank you for being here. Will you continue the conversation with the Atlanta Citizen Review Board in regards to an expansion of power? To be more specific, I mean changing the ordinance to give Atlanta Citizen Board more power in helping to hold those bad apples accountable? I was wondering if you as the Police Chief would be supportive of that movement and at least continue to have the conversation.*
12. **(Chief Shields)** *I will have any kind of conversation, but without having details on what the changes will be, I am reluctant to comment. I do want to ensure that our employees have due process and are not caught up in the politics of the day, but I am open to any conversation.*

13. **(Williams)** *I think along with what Gino (Brogdon) just said, part of our frustration and the frustration of the board throughout the years, is the low number of recommendations that we made that are actually accepted. In a way, we are just going through the motion. We know that you are new. We want you to know early what our concerns are because if more of them were actually approved, then we will feel like our work is appreciated; the citizens and the history of the board actually mean something other than...yeah, you are right, let's make a recommendation...sixty percent don't matter.*
14. **(Chief Shields)** *In preparing for tonight, one of the things that I wanted to do was review the data. I had an idea what the percentage was, but one of the difficulties I had...and this is not actually the board's fault, this goes back but I think that we can do a better job in reconciling our data consistently with the board. Because what I couldn't delineate was...if we sustained, but sustained on a different charge than what the board recommended, how is that captured? If we not sustained initially because the investigation was still on going, did we ever come back and say that we did agree with you? If we had four officers that were charged and we sustained two of the four, did that look as though we didn't agree? There wasn't enough detail for me to really try to identify where the short comings were. I would ask any feedback that you have in this area or this particular subject matter would be very helpful. I agree with you...the percentage jumped out of what we agree with you on. I just couldn't derive where disconnect took place in the data that has been captured on our side, and I need to get there. The good news is since the beginning of January, we started capturing moving forward. I really want some of last year's data as well, especially as it carries over from 2016 to 2017.*
15. **(Williams)** *I like that answer and also probably means that no one who captures the data thought that that was necessary. Maybe that is one thing that you could do is to makes sure that when APD make a decision as we get our decision that it is reported back to us and that data is captured so then the data can be updated. Then we could get a truer percentage.*
16. **(Chief Shields)** *It would be helpful. Then I would have a better idea where we truly disagree.*
17. **(Williams)** *One of the other things that we would like to see...as we move forward, there are a lot of things that are going on with young people who are protesting across the nation; as well as in Atlanta. Our hats off to APD for being able to handle crowds that get out of control. During this time of protesting for the last couple of years in Atlanta, you have been a high ranking officer who was a part of all of this. With that being said, during this time there were several things that happened where it's obvious that ACRB needs to be at the table. We were not invited to the event where the Mayor spoke to the "unlovable brats" and it was obvious that one of their demands or a couple of their demands was already a part of what ACRB is doing. So, had we not been in the room, we would not have been privy to what was going on. It appears that eighty percent of the time you guys are doing something where we can be in the room and actually be helpful...because we have community outreach also. That would actually be a great partnership for us. Instead of always trying to figure out what did APD do? What can we do and how can we be on the same page? ACRB is not even on your press release distribution. Something that small is very important that we are at the table or be invited so that we can continue to be a part of this process.*
18. **(Chief Shields)** *I think that's doable. I would say that one of the things that we rack our brains...it's something that came to us when all the protests were going on...finding the conduits to connect with. The generation of folks that are not going to the NPUs, they are probably are not going on the City website. If you have thoughts or ideas and you feel that you can tap into people that we are not always going to get...we will take it. Dialogue is critical. Being out with in the protests...I got it. It makes sense. I say a few people that were trying to stir things up; I don't think that they were from Atlanta. I think that they were professional protestors. I want to have a dialogue with them other than just a couple of times seeing them on the streets protesting. But what would also help if you had other specifics? Someone just gave me an example on the press release.*

19. **(Williams)** *Lee and Charles, can you give us specific examples where APD did things in the last year where we weren't invited? I think one was actually the...*
20. **(Reid)** *Some of the community town halls. We find out things just by happenstance.*
21. **(Harrison)** *One specifically, there was a town hall meeting at Clark Atlanta that was towards the end of last year. That would have been perfect for us to be a part of.*
22. **(Williams)** *We were actually told that we were going to be invited to the Body Worn Camera roll-out. We never received an invitation, and we came out long time ago being in support of body worn cameras.*
23. **(Chief Shields)** *I also saw that you all had mentioned the recruit training at the academy. That's doable. Major Schierbaum runs the academy. He's a pro. We will get that done.*
24. **(Bartels)** *Congratulations on your appointment. We all recognize that obvious there are some neighborhoods that have crime problems. A lot of that is related to drugs. The need to enforce drug laws often raises questions about whether people's constitution rights are being violated. Whether if officer do or do not have justification to stop to detain people. What are your thoughts on balancing the need to enforce the law with the right to respect or the need to respect people's constitutional rights and maintain trust in the community?*
25. **(Chief Shields)** *I think that we are in a much better space than we were at the conception of the board. Where I am standing, whether or not a person has drugs, you better have reasonable suspicious to even touch that person. We put so much emphasis on training and supervision in this area, I can't give someone directive to go out and not enforce the drug law. I think that way to steer clear from violating rights is to not put numerical demands on your employees; they have to get quotas; they have to bring in a certain number of tickets. Our emphasis is very much on, I want the guns off the streets and I want the folks that are committing robberies off the streets. That is the message from our command staff. Our emphasis is on violent crime. All that I can say is that we weigh in very heavily on our supervisors to really pay attention to cases that are coming before them; to read the narratives before them; usually will tell you quite a bit. This has been for a few years. Chief Turner did not drive numbers or arrest numbers and I think that is a very slippery slope.*
26. **(Pitre)** *Congratulations. I went to the body worn camera training and the staff was amazing. They were definitely engaging and explained it pretty well. When will it be official for all the officers to wear the body worn camera?*
27. **(Chief Shields)** *Correct me if I am wrong, we should have four of the six zones done. The holdup was not with the cameras, the holdup was the infrastructure at the precinct to download from the cameras. We have the cameras. It's just the matter of getting Information of Technology to get it to a place where it can support the cameras. Our timeline is aggressive, but it is a matter of pushing the IT people through.*
28. **(Bozarth)** *You shook up the command structure pretty thoroughly when you took over. Can you comment as to what you were trying to accomplish for those personnel changes?*
29. **(Chief Shields)** *I actually had multiple retirements that left vacancies. So that right there created a triple effect because they were at the highest levels. I also felt that there were some people who could perform optimally in a different assignment. I felt that there were folks who had an enormous amount of talent that if I put them at the next level, they would give me my best results and I had folks that I thought like they may have gotten too comfortable. I am trying to put together the best team so that people can showcase their talents in an optimal fashion. I have an incredible talented command staff and incredible talented staff. We got 2400 people...there going to be folks to disappoint, but on a whole, I can tell you, I am very proud of the police and the product. When I see short comings and things should be differently, it's more that we are trying to change the culture and to get people away from...police is so traditional based.*

30. **(Houston-Torrence)** *Congratulations on your appointment. Living in Southeast Atlanta, we have had a rash of carjacking at gas stations. What is the department's assessment of this and what are you doing proactively to deter that?*
31. **(Chief Shields)** *This trend started at first jumping in cars and stealing the cars. We are started to see it at Bolton Road in Marietta. They (Marietta) would put a lot of people out there and what they found was that the minute they left, juveniles came back in. We knew that was what we were dealing with. It escalated and became carjacking. We were pretty sure that it was still a juvenile element; which is a whole new discussion. Recently we had one...what we did was identified our top ten locations and we asked people if they could work overtime and go to these locations. We had other units in patrol around these locations. We had made that change and two days in, one of the individuals was at the gas station on Campbellton Road and right across the street, the carjacking occurred. Actually, what they did...they shot at a man, the gun jammed and they took off. We pursued them; we got them. It was four juveniles. What resonated is the ease in which the young person pulled the trigger. If the gun had not malfunctioned, I would have had a homicide. I know we have a relatively small number of individuals in the juvenile population were driving very large crimes numbers. What occurring is if we take them to juvenile court, they either don't have enough points to be kept in custody or they get in custody and come out a couple of days later. No one is asking that these kids go to jail. The problem is, if you don't give them alternatives going back to nothing, they are going to end up in big people jail if they are not a victim first. What we try to do is get a discussion get the juvenile to understand there has to be a medium between a person just going to prison and the person going back to the streets. It's rather frustrating. We are taking steps where we can to have huge amount of juvenile outreach trying to identify the kids that are getting arrested the most; get connected with them and their parent or guardian; offer social services to really redirect the kids. It's a tough issue because the system doesn't seem equipped to know what to do.*
32. **(Williams)** *Would you be so gracious as to come meet with us quarterly? Major Price...she is strong advocate for PAL (Police Athletic League). I'm glad that you are smiling. She is working with you and I hope that we can do some of that outreach through APAB (Atlanta Planning Advisory Board) NPUs and our churches.*
33. **(Chief Shields)** *Sure. Absolutely.*
34. **(Williams)** *Mini precincts. I am sure that you have a vision on what you want to do with that, especially with Greenbrier...what you want to do with that.*
35. **(Chief Shields)** *With precincts there are expectations and you have to staff them. People say that they will give you the space for free, well, but they expect people to be staffed there and we just can't do that. We can't meet all of the requests for all off the free buildings that we get. We are not looking to expand to further any precinct. We want the ones that we have to be operational and fully staff. Is there a particular concern you have with Greenbrier area?*
36. **(Williams)** *I'm a native. I lived all over the country. We know that the many precincts concept can work. We have been asking in that area about that...getting varies responses. Harold (Hardnett) is part of the NPU in that area too. As a community, we need to figure out how to work that out with APD. Maybe the expectation should be 2-3 days a week. Maybe PAL can have some activities twice a month. I am sure that there is a way we can work it, where it is not a seven day thing.*
37. **(Chief Shields)** *You are seeing the officer go in/out of the precinct doing their reports and not fully staffed. Greenbrier should be one of the easier fixes. That is a busy area for us. We can talk.*
38. **(Williams)** *We appreciate your time and your openness to continue dialogue.*

...End of Q & A.