

APN) ATLANTA — The Atlanta City Council’s Public Safety/Legal Administration Committee (PS/LA) discussed and then voted unanimously to confirm the changes on an ordinance granting new powers to the Atlanta Citizens Review Board (A CRB) at its meeting on Tuesday, March 15, 2016 at 3:00 p.m.

Supporting the measure were Councilmembers C.T. Martin (District 10), Ivory Lee Young Jr. (District 3), Clela Winslow (District 4), Keisha Lance Bottoms (District 11), and Mary Norwood (Post 2-at-large).

The ACRB was created in 2007, with the support of Mayor Shirley Franklin, after the police murder of Kathryn Johnston, 92, at the hands of the Atlanta Police Department, during a botched drug raid.

As previously reported by Atlanta Progressive News, the amendment contains the following new provisions:

- Broaden Board jurisdiction (right now the ACRB dismissed thirty percent of complaints because they fall outside the Board’s purview);

- Allow anonymous complaints;

- Increase Board membership;

- Add Board training requirements;

- Create new quorum requirements;

- Create new outreach requirements;

- Require compensation for Board Members;

- Revise board term limits to two consecutive terms

- Create rules for the removal of Board Members;

- Revise the minimum standard of evidence required to investigate a complaint;

- Create a mediation program for police and civilians;

- Require a detailed response from the Chief of Police explaining his or her decision to accept or reject Board recommendations for sanctions of police officers;

- A 25 dollar subpoena fee to be paid the Atlanta Police and Corrections Department for any appearance made by any official at a hearing not during the official’s normal business hours [this item is a new Committee substitution];

- A new seat to the Board appointed by the Metro Atlanta Urban League [new substitution]; and

- A new seat to the Board appointed by the Georgia Coalition for the People’s Agenda [new substitution].

While these changes were mostly identical to what was initially proposed in February of 2015, there were three new additions, as noted above.

A fourth proposal that did not get included in the final passed ordinance was for a new seat to be added and appointed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

“I take issue with bringing the ACLU onto the Board because this is a Citizens Review Board,” Councilman Young said during the Committee Meeting.

“The ACLU is already watching all of us, I do not see very much benefit in including a very political organization on an already large board,” Young said.

The ACLU appointment was championed by Chairman Martin, but when challenged by Young, Martin quickly made the request to scratch that article from the amendment.

Councilwoman Norwood asked for a vote to remove the language regarding the ACLU appointment.

Now, if the two new seats are approved by Full Council, the Board will seat thirteen instead of eleven members.

The Committee quickly agreed, and moved on to voting “Yes” on the rest of the ordinance.

Since its creation, the ACRB has continuously been revisited by the Atlanta City Council to make it more effective.

In 2010, for example, the Council granted the ACRB direct subpoena power. The current round of amendments, however, is the most comprehensive package of reforms since the organization’s founding.

The new quorum requirements are that there must be five board members present for any vote to proceed. All votes will be held to the “preponderance of evidence” standard of proof for all decisions.

Board appointees will not be subject to background checks. A felony charge will preclude an individual from taking their seat on the board.

Board Members will now be required to participate in yearly training sessions, led by the Executive Director.

Board Members will now be required to participate in a Police ride-a-long within one year of their appointments to the Board, and also complete sections, at the direction of the Executive Director, of the Atlanta Police Department’s Citizens Academy.

Board Members will be compensated for their time at the Academy.

Board Members must complete at least three community outreach activities per calendar year as part of the new requirements.

New policies regarding board member removal include judgments indicating incompetence, neglect of duty, misconduct, malfeasance, or failure to participate in training requirements.

The Board will pay Board Members 25 dollars per meeting to encourage broader participation, especially among low-income Atlantans.

The amendment also includes clearer definitions of the terms discrimination, excessive force, mediation, retaliation, failure to provide identification, discriminatory references, and harassment.

New requirements regarding Board vacancies require that vacancies be filled by the appropriate parties within ninety days of the date of notice. If not filled by the appropriate party, the City Council may make an appointment to the Board for the remainder of the vacant term.

There is one ACRB seat that has remained unfilled from the Mayor's office, and one seat that is vacant that represents Atlanta Neighborhood Planning Units S through Z.

Having passed unanimously out of Committee, the item will appear on the Full Council's Consent Agenda on Monday, unless an individual Council member requests the item be debated.

<http://atlantaprogressivenews.com/2016/03/16/atlanta-public-safety-committee-approves-new-crb-powers/>