The View of the Executive Director

Greetings! I am happy to bring to you the latest news from the Atlanta Citizen Review Board.

It has been a great summer so far. Since our last newsletter, the agency has been involved in many outreach projects throughout the city. With the support of a newly created volunteer corps, we are positioning ourselves to communicate to more Atlanta residents in their communities. Outreach is a proactive activity that is designed to increase communication between the agency and the residents of Atlanta.

Through outreach, the agency is able to spread the ACRB message of citizens knowing their rights, building citizens’ awareness of the agency and our services, and receiving invaluable feedback from citizens about the agency and police and corrections officers.

So thanks to our volunteers for taking time out of their busy schedules to help us at meetings, rallies, festivals, block parties and our training workshops. Kudos to all citizens who get involved in their communities and keep a watchful eye on activities where they live, work and play.

And remember. If you ever have a question about the agency and/or a complaint about an Atlanta police and corrections officers’ action, contact the ACRB at 404-865-8622. Email us at acrb@atlantaga.gov. Visit our website at acrbgov.org.

The Atlanta Citizen Review Board is here to serve you!

Don’t Run Billboard Controversy Draws National Attention

“Stay Calm. DON’T RUN! Report Police Misconduct.” The 5’x11’ billboards that were posted in 20 locations throughout Atlanta sparked praise and strong disagreement among citizens, on local news shows, social media and throughout the nation.

Supporters overwhelmingly praised the message and quadrupled the agency’s corps of volunteers. Very vocal opponents said among other things that it violated a citizen’s constitutional right to run and that it was an insult to slaves who had to flee for their freedom. DON’T RUN is part of a larger KNOW YOUR RIGHTS training promotion that the ACRB does weekly, citywide, mostly at library branches.

The ACRB Board, while not abandoning the campaign, formed a committee that developed alternative messaging for future KNOW YOUR RIGHTS billboards.
On selected Saturdays, among the many shops and kiosks at Greenbriar Mall, shoppers now have a chance to learn about ACRB.

This summer the ACRB staff began making regular appearances, meeting/greeting shoppers and taking misconduct complaints at the popular SW Atlanta mall as Greenbriar celebrates its 50th anniversary year.

Patrons stop by the ACRB presentation table with questions, comments and specific stories about encounters with law enforcement. A seasoned ACRB investigator is available with answers and a complaint form, ready to provide citizens with what their rights are under the law.

Greenbriar joins Mall West End in offering an ACRB Community Outreach Day in a retail facility.

ACRB Know Your Rights Training Workshops (KYR) are now available to all 34 branches of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System. The free one-hour session focuses on what a citizen should lawfully say and do if encountered by a sworn officer of the Atlanta Police Department or Atlanta Corrections Department.

Know Your Rights Training at Atlanta-Fulton Public Library

ACRB was there as thousands of citizens came to Mozley Park for The Juneteenth Atlanta Parade and Music Festival, four days of live music, poetry, ethnic foods, fashions, arts & crafts that commemorated the 150th anniversary of Texas slaves learning about their emancipation. Free ACRB Activity and Coloring Books and vital information about agency’s services were offered.

ACRB Meets and Greets Citizens at the Juneteenth Festival

“...WE HAVE TO GET THE WORD OUT BECAUSE MANY OF THE PEOPLE THAT WE ENCOUNTERED DID NOT KNOW THAT WE ARE HERE AND DID NOT KNOW WHAT WE DO.”

Brian Fleming, ACRB Sr. Investigator
Lawrence Williams is a retired auditor who has worked for the State of Georgia, MARTA and the Federal Government. Watching TV one night, he heard about ACRB and the DON'T RUN Campaign that was part of a plan to alert citizens about the agency’s KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TRAINING WORKSHOPS.

Williams not only became an outspoken supporter of the campaign, but also immediately decided to become a volunteer for ACRB. He recently worked with the agency during the Juneteenth Parade and Music Festival 2015 at Mozeley Park.

"It is a fantastic idea to put this organization together. I think it’s definitely needed. And the campaign shouldn’t be softened up one bit. In fact, it should go further."

Williams, whose father was an officer with the Buffalo Police Department, says "When you run, police think you’ve done something wrong, figure you’re guilty of something...Police kill people." In Williams’ opinion "People and guns do not mix."

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Erica Tucker says when she thinks of ACRB, “I think of one of the hardest tasks to ask a human being to do with discretion and impartiality” because she says sometimes a dispute between citizen and police is complicated by a lack of evidence.

In the winter of 2014, Tucker and partner Brandon Parrott were confronted by an Atlanta Police Officer. They allege that they were falsely arrested. Ms. Tucker said her head was slammed into a brick wall; that the officer pointed his firearm at her partner and engaged in abusive language at them.

The ACRB Board after considering the evidence sustained the allegations of false arrest and excessive force but did not sustain the abusive language charge. The Board said that the Officer should receive a five day suspension

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When Regina Watts thinks about ACRB, she says "I’m glad there is a venue for us to go to because it gives the people a voice that someone is going to listen to us."

Ms. Watts currently chooses to live in a low-income neighborhood with her mother, but in the past, she has also resided in some of Atlanta’s most affluent zip codes. Thirty years a manager in the food service industry, Watts considered herself adept at dealing with people. Previously, she said she had only positive encounters with Atlanta police officers. But that was about to dramatically change.

“I was headed to the store one morning. I passed a bunch of officers looking like they were putting up a roadblock or something. An officer got behind me with his blue lights on. I pull over. He gets out. I held out my ID with my hand out the window, and that’s when he tries to pull me out the car. I saw him unstrap his gun...He pulled it out. He puts the gun up to my face and he goes ‘Get out the car,’ He twists my arm and told me to open the (car) door with the other arm, and I did, and that’s when he put handcuffs on me.”

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“Once you put a gun on, it makes you a different person with a sense of power. Added with a badge, they think they have all the power in the world,” said Williams.

The deeply impassioned opinions of the retired auditor, who is finishing a Masters program in Information Technology at the University of Georgia, are strongly influenced by a traumatic childhood experience of being suspected of stealing. Two officers approached the 13 year old and his friend while playing on a train viaduct.

“They came up on both sides with guns drawn. A little white kid had his bike stolen. They took us down to the police station. I asked, ‘Can I have a drink of water?’ An officer showed me the fountain, followed me, tapping on his gun.”

Once they learned that Williams was the son of a fellow officer, “it became a big joke, like ‘I didn’t know it was your kid.’” It is an incident that Williams has relived in his memory many times since.

Williams says citizens “…need to get training (on) how to deal with officers in a traffic stop. Know your rights. ...Just be silent... Ask, ‘Am I free to go?’...It leads back to the Don’t Run thing.”

Taking it a step further, Williams says “I think it (KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TRAINING) should be a part of the driver’s license curriculum.”

A number of officers in the area arrived including the officer’s sargeant.

“They ran my ID, told me they were sorry then took the handcuffs off. First they told me there was a robbery in the area, I told him 'I didn’t rob anybody sir;' told me there was some kind of shooting... I said 'I wasn't involved in a shooting sir, I was just going to the store.' Sargeant said 'We're sorry' then left.”

Watts’ twisted left arm ached for months. Being handcuffed with a pistol to her head traumatized her. Saying "Sorry" was not a sufficient response for Watts.

She first filed a complaint with a City of Atlanta agency but received no response. But within days of registering with ACRB, her complaint against the officer was investigated and her claim of excessive force was sustained by the Board. "Just because you live in the so-called hood urban areas, you shouldn’t have to be treated like that.”

Testimonials: “When I think of ACRB... (from page 3)

Lawrence Williams

Regina Watts

Erica Tucker

The keyword in the Atlanta Citizen Review Board is CITIZEN. The agency is only as effective as the level of Citizen involvement. This is why ACRB urges all Citizens to regularly monitor, question and support its work. This is why ACRB urges all Citizens to know where your elected officials stand on civilian oversight of police and corrections. This is why it is so important for Citizens to be registered and vote. This is why Citizens need to join and be active in community groups. Get involved in Neighborhood Planning Units (NPUs). Attend Public Safety meetings, Atlanta City Council meetings and KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TRAINING WORKSHOPS. Become a member of the ACRB Board. (There are currently a number of vacancies.) Be an ACRB Volunteer through our Community Outreach Volunteer Ambassador Program (COVAP). Fill the chambers to capacity when Council votes to fund issues that matter to Citizens like you. Thank you, Citizens of Atlanta, for your continued support.