

Westchester County Police Reform & Reimagining Task Force

Implementation of Recommendations

The Westchester County Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force submitted 52 recommendations to New York State as part of its Final Report. Of those recommendations, several required State action, several were referred to the Board of Legislators, and 38 were referred to the County's Executive branch for action. Below is a summary of the recommendations referred for Executive action that have been implemented to date. It is important to note that implementation of the Task Force recommendations is an ongoing process and this summary will continue to be updated.

Recommendation 1. To prepare law enforcement personnel (civilian and uniformed) for consistent, positive community encounters and engagement, we recommend implicit bias training and intercultural competency training for all law enforcement personnel.

Implementation: All sworn police personnel receive training on implicit bias and intercultural competency. In addition, almost all of the recruit level training weaves the concepts of Procedural Justice and Principled Policing into the instruction.

Recommendation 2. Training facilitation should be a team approach between experts in these topics and law enforcement.

Implementation: Different examples of trainings using a team approach:

- Bias Crimes/Incidents: Taught by Academy Staff and DA's office
- Persons with Disabilities: Academy staff and persons with autism, Tourette's Syndrome, etc. teach their respective blocks
- Cultural Diversity and Inclusion: Academy staff, Neighbors Link, and members of LGBTQ community teach block
- Crisis Intervention Training: Academy staff, mental health professionals / clinicians / persons with lived experience teach the block

Recommendation 3. Create an environment that reinforces positive community engagement by identifying and valuing skills and competencies within police officers.

Implementation: Examples include:

- WCDPS School Resource Officer Program
- "PACT" Program in Mount Kisco (Police And Community Together)
- Strong social media presence
- Cadet (Explorers) Program and internship programs
- Presentations to school and civic groups
- The Patrol Division's Community Affairs Unit, including events they set up, such as Coffee with a Cop and Cops and Cones

Recommendation 4. WCDPS shall provide a clear description of the role that County Police play in the municipalities of Cortlandt and Mount Kisco on the WCDPS website and on the Town of Cortlandt and Village of Mount Kisco websites.

Implementation:

[Read about our policing of Mt. Kisco.](#)

[Read about our policing of Cortlandt.](#)

Recommendation 5. There shall be a formal review of the WCDPS's use of social media, and an analysis of how this medium could be used for branding and community outreach.

Implementation: The department established a Social Media Committee comprised of representatives of the different divisions of the department. Committee initiated actions:

- Launched Facebook page and Twitter and Instagram accounts
- Established a "following"
- Platforms provide relevant real time information on issues and incidents affecting Westchester residents and Westchester commuters

In addition, the Department's App provides information on community and/or department sponsored events and highlights community policing and other officer engagement activities

Recommendation 6. Consider the possibility of creating community liaisons on WCDPS to serve as ambassadors to various segments of the population, especially those that have traditionally been considered marginalized.

Implementation: In December 2021, the Patrol Division's Community Policing Unit developed a community resource officer (CRO) program and coordinated with the State of New York Police Juvenile Officers Association (SNYPJOA) to create a 40-hour block of dynamic specialized instruction on community oriented policing. The CRO training launched statewide in August 2021 and in Westchester County in October 2021. Currently WCDPS's Community Policing and Schools supervisor and 3 officers have received the training. A second CRO training occurred in April 2022 at the Police Academy.

In September 2021, the Department added their first CRO to the Westchester Community College campus in a contractual agreement with the College.

WCDPS initiated the CRO program in Cortland in early January 2022 with favorable reviews. The Mount Kisco Board voted to authorize its own CRO Program in early February on a trial basis. The WCC CRO program continues to receive praise as an essential component of the College community.

Recommendation 8. WCDPS shall obtain primary data or feedback from the school districts it serves.

Implementation. In 2021, WCDPS collaborated with the school districts it serves on a plan to garner formal feedback from district and school administration teams, parents, and students, targeting completion in the fall 2021. This schedule remains on track. Survey results will be compiled and a summary report will be produced.

Recommendation 9. SROs shall receive training on implicit bias, restorative justice practices, and mentoring.

Implementation. WCDPS School Resource Officers (SROs) receive training in these areas from the Police Academy, National Association of School Resource Officers and SNYPJOA (State of NY Police Juvenile Officers Association). All of the SROs have received and continue to receive specialized school based and community policing training, which includes implicit bias, restorative justice practices, and mentoring.

Recommendation 10. Consider the creation of “Police Community Support Officers” (PCSOs) or use a similar structure.

Implementation. WCDPS utilizes Community Resource Officers to be the key liaisons in the local communities they police (Mt. Kisco and Cortlandt). In addition, the recent formation of Project Alliance has added the 24/7 availability of Mental Health professionals to respond instead of or along with police in circumstances with persons in crisis.

Recommendation 11. Reimagines police officers to pledge to use force as a last resort and explore non-lethal technology.

Implementation. The DPS Use of Force Policy is available on the department’s website. Generally speaking, DPS police officers and peace officers may “use only such force as is objectively reasonable under the circumstances to make an arrest, prevent an escape, defend themselves or others, or achieve some other lawful objective.” Executive Law Section 840 requires that New York law enforcement agencies have written use of force policies which are consistent with the model policy published by the Municipal Police Training Council through the Division of Criminal Justice Services. The “objectively reasonable” standard – which is the standard applied by the Supreme Court when evaluating use of force cases (See *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 [1989]) – is incorporated in the MPTC model policy.

Training on how “not” to use force is also offered. Classes on Procedural Justice, Professional Communication (de-escalation), CIT, and Disability Awareness all cover ways to interact with and calm down individuals who may be agitated or in crisis. These skills are also checked and tested during reality based trainings and role play scenarios.

DPS utilizes less lethal and non-lethal options and continuously evaluates new options for safety and effectiveness for departmental use.

Recommendation 12. Consider the suggestions included from the report prepared by Town of Cortlandt titled, “Public Safety and Policing Improvements.”

Implementation. The Patrol Operations staff and Chief Calabrese met with the Town Supervisor and members of their Police Reform Committee, as well as the Town Board, to

discuss their completed task force recommendations. Town officials were pleased with all aspects of the WCPD policing and were complimentary throughout the meeting.

Recommendation 13. Design and add a series of questions regarding an officer's interaction with the community they serve when considering promotions and/or annual evaluations.

Implementation. WCDPS uses the County's NeoGov system. The system includes a rating category for "Public Contact" which rates traits such as treating people fairly, cultural sensitivity, non-discriminatory language, and empathy.

Recommendation 14. Conduct a joint de-escalation (also known as verbal judo) training with the Department of Correction.

Implementation. WCDPS Training Director consulted with the WCDOC Training Director to compare the DOC de-escalation training curriculum with the DPS de-escalation training. It was determined that the DPS de-escalation training was the most current and better suited for police officer training.

Recommendation 15. WCDPS should explore national accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies' (CALEA) Advanced Law Enforcement Accreditation Program.

Implementation. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA) is a private, U.S. based corporation. The cost they charge for credentialing an agency of WCDPS size is presently \$16,125 plus airfare, lodging and other actual costs associated with the cost of the on-site assessment. There is also an annual continuation cost of \$5,000.

WCDPS is currently accredited by the NYS Dept. of Criminal Justice Services under their Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (LEAP).

A comparison of the CALEA and DCJS Standards shows a significant overlap with the strict standards to which we already adhere. In addition, many of the CALEA standards are already covered by NYS Laws (Civil Service, Public Officers Law, etc), other specialized accreditation standards (NYS Tactical Team for SRT, ANSI National Accreditation Board for FIU, NYS Sheriff's Assn for Civil), County Laws, County Executive Orders, and WCDPS Department Policy).

In some parts of the country where they do not have a robust state accreditation program, and those other standards and requirements are not present, CALEA Accreditation could be a great benefit. In our county however, CALEA seems to be redundant and unnecessary. It should be noted that 20 police agencies in Westchester have DCJS Accreditation and another 7 agencies have applications for Accreditation pending with DCJS.

Recommendation 16. Establish policies related to WCDPS's digital presence.

Implementation. Various activities were performed to implement this recommendation:

FOIL fees: Many FOIL requests directed at WCDPS involve information on Department Policies and Procedures. Now that the Department Manual is on the departmental website, costs to the public should be eliminated. As for other documents, WCDPS has added the following on their website:

1. The Department's Annual Report for the last two years
2. Brief description of the NYS Accreditation Program
3. Procedure for providing feedback on officer conduct
4. One-stop "contact us" page
5. "Officer of the Month" page (*in progress*)
6. Description of the Police Advisory Board
7. Enforcement Activity Report

Recommendation 17. Establish a policy for peer-review error management training.

Implementation. WCDPS utilizes peer review for technical review of calculations, lab work, etc., where appropriate. Performance reviews are completed by supervisors.

Recommendation 18. Establish strong whistleblower protections.

Implementation. The County already does this via Executive Orders, which reinforce existing NYS laws. The DPS also reinforces via its Department Manual.

Recommendation 19. WCDPS must commit to being transparent with the public, which means to embrace those principles and values that promote transparency in its internal and external policies and practices.

Implementation. Language added to the Department's landing page: *"In an effort to increase transparency and accountability, Public Safety's Department Manual is available online"* and the Reports page, *"As part of the Westchester County Department of Public Safety's commitment to increase transparency and accountability to the public it serves, the department publishes periodic reports on its functions and enforcement activity. These reports can be accessed below."*

The following additional language will be added as Paragraph #1 and 2 on the Department's landing page:

The Westchester County Department of Public Safety is committed to protecting the safety and security of all who live, work and recreate in Westchester County. This is accomplished not only through police services provided directly to the public, but also by the high level of support the department provides to federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in and around Westchester County.

In addition, the department embraces those principles and values that promote transparency in its internal and external policies and practices. The Westchester County Department of Public Safety's Department Manual has been made available to the public, along with a number of periodic reports on its functions and enforcement activity. In addition, the department encourages the public to submit inquiries and feedback regarding department personnel and operations via the General Comments and Questions page.

Recommendation 20. Implement policies to educate the public on police values, principles, and operations.

Implementation. Policies implemented via: SRO's, Social Media, Community Relations Unit, outreach events, Neighbors Link, etc. Similarly, each time a presentation is given to a group, WCDPS presenters educate that group on the Department's values, principles, and overall organization. Additionally, WCDPS's Recruitment Program was overhauled (*see response to recommendation #34*).

Recommendation 21. Promote and engage in more non-investigatory community interaction.

Implementation. WCDPS does this in the Village of Mt. Kisco with the PACT program.

Recommendation 22. Maintain consistent community dialogue and receive and provide periodic feedback.

Implementation. WCDPS now meets with the Mount Kisco Mayor on a monthly basis. WCDPS's liaison (a Patrol Lieutenant) is in communication with the Mayor on a daily basis as well. A strong relationship also exists with the community-serving organization Neighbors' Link.

Recommendation 24. WCDPS should endeavor to provide a body-worn camera to every police officer, regardless of their rank, and equip every police vehicle with dashboard cameras.

Implementation. All WCDPS uniformed police officers and first line supervisors are assigned body-worn cameras. BWCs are also being provided for plainclothes Civil Enforcement Officers. All patrol post cars are equipped with mobile video cameras.

Recommendation 25. Enhance officer training.

Implementation. Yearly in-service training reflects current best training practices combined with current events as well as training review. As updates to training become available either via DCJS or the law enforcement industry itself, these best practices and knowledge are passed down to rank and file via in-service training. In the case of CIT, this class is offered regularly twice a year and is also part of the Basic Course for Police Officers. An additional 10 officers received said training with plans for more officers to receive it later this year.

Instead of developing a stand-alone leadership course, the department has made the acclaimed FBI LEEDA series available to its members. This is a series of courses that total 15 days that deal with all manner of leadership dilemmas and principles that face first line supervisors all the way up to top police executives.

Recommendation 26. Develop a library of training videos.

Implementation. There is currently a library of a dozen or so hours of training videos. While the Department recognizes that this is a recommendation that will be never be "complete" per se, it has committed to adding to this library over time. In addition, short "roll call" videos are being produced as to increase training opportunities and cover/review quick topics and best practices.

Recommendation 27. Increase in-service training requirements.

Implementation. Core training requirements are based on NYS accreditation standards. The Department will seek to supplement in-service training opportunities on relevant and timely topics as time permits. (*See recommendation #26*). The current minimum accreditation requirements take up all training time at this time. Extra training, such as the aforementioned CIT, are offered, but are not “required.” The Department is continuously looking at ways to increase training opportunities while at the same time balancing the additional OT costs associated with back-filling when officers are pulled for training.

Recommendation 28. Enhance orientation training for transfer officers.

Implementation. Enhanced orientation has been in place since 2021. Orientation now includes topics such as Procedural Justice, Implicit Bias, Disability Awareness, De-Escalation. Even though some officers may have already had these trainings in their previous departments, the concepts, techniques, and best practices are reviewed with them and it is explained these topics relate to department policy.

Recommendation 29. Increase training hours for the County Police Academy’s Basic Training Course for police officers to include one week devoted to Procedural Justice, Cultural Diversity, and Bias Related Crimes and Incidents.

Implementation. Training in these areas has been accomplished by shortening or removing some topics that are no longer required or require less time by DCJS and inserting new blocks of instruction into the schedule.

Recommendation 30. Develop and implement a mobile app allowing officers and members of the community to communicate and reference the departmental manual.

Implementation. The Community Engagement App called “Westchester County Police Department” launched in early 2022.

Recommendation 34. Promote service as a police officer to the public and proactively educate and engage with the public.

Implementation. In addition to all the programs/initiatives previously mentioned (e.g. involvement with community groups, community events, social media, SRO's, etc.), WCDPS has overhauled its recruitment efforts in the following ways:

In the months leading up to the exam filing date:

- WCDPS presented to a dozen or so college/community groups.
- The presentation includes a wealth of information, not just about the benefits of a career in law enforcement, but also about what WCDPS officers do and the communities they serve. Several of the groups to whom WCDPS presents recorded the material (with the Dept.’s permission) for further distribution.
- As part of this effort, WCDPS produced two recruitment videos.
- In the future, WCDPS plans to present to college/community groups on a regular basis, with a particular focus on years when an entrance-level exam is being offered. There are also plans to “continuously recruit” from their Seasonal Park Ranger ranks.

- In August 2021, WCDPS created a Recruitment Team to engage in proactive and continuous community outreach and recruitment efforts.
- In December 2021, the Patrol Division’s Community Policing Unit reestablished their Explorer Program and developed a Corps of Cadets Program targeting high school students with an interest in law enforcement. The Cadet program leadership team will be working closely with School Resource Officers in the northern county schools and communities for recruitment and support. The program began in January 2022 and plans are in discussion to enable the 18-year-old cadets to obtain summer positions in their Seasonal Park Ranger program.
- WCDPS participated in criminal justice information sessions sponsored by Saint Thomas Aquinas College in February 2022.
- The Department initiated and launched the Police Engagement with Communities and Schools (PECS) Cooperative for law enforcement agencies throughout the region. The Cooperative is focused on information sharing, best practices and networking on community policing and school safety. WCDPS introduced the PACT program to their law enforcement partners at the first meeting, held at the Police Academy on November 2021.
- In Feb. 2022, the Police Allied with Community and Schools (“PACS,” formerly PECS) has expanded and continues to promote the exchange among SROs throughout Westchester and Putnam Counties. The next PACS meeting was on March 16, 2022.
- Cadet Program successfully launched on January 1, 2022 with twenty-three participating students representing all school districts with WCPD SROs and Bedford (Mount Kisco).

Recommendation 35. Enhance the County’s already successful Police and Community Together (PACT) community engagement program and make it available as a model for other communities.

Implementation. WCDPS promoted its community outreach in Mount Kisco and outlined every effort in real time on its social media. They have also shared their outreach, including the PACT program, with many municipal police agencies (at their request). For more information, see CRO Program explained in Recommendation 6.

Recommendation 37. Establish an open disciplinary process.

Implementation. WCDPS has an open disciplinary process and does all of the things put forth in this recommendation, such as: Publish the procedures of the disciplinary process on its website, provide for anonymous and non-anonymous complaint procedures, provide a formal procedure by which a member of the public may compliment a police officer, and implement a policy of providing for status updates to complainants upon request.

Recommendation 52. Screen for white supremacy in law enforcement (BOL-added recommendation).

Implementation. WCDPS conducts extensive background investigations of all police officer candidates which include screening for this type of activity and behavior.