

6/29/2020

## Community Outreach and Policy Discussion

### Letter from Sheriff Michelle LaJoye Young to Kent County Residents



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SHERIFF

I thought it would be helpful to provide an overview of those things that the Sheriff's Office has been focused on over the last several weeks in regards to the community conversation around racism and how that relates to the way we police and manage police officers. I think the most important thing we can do in these times is to listen with an intent to hear, not to defend. We have and will continue to listen intently to those specific things that as a Sheriff's Office we can impact. We have also, of course, done a specific review of our policies to ensure the right measures are in place in Kent County. Specifically, we reviewed the following in our policy manual:

- Chokeholds have never been an authorized use of non-lethal force. This was very clear in our policy
- We have several places within training and policy that requires an officer to attempt to de-escalate before the use of any force if possible. This has been our practice for decades. Training is incredibly important to make this more than a policy statement. We do have training in place and will continue to focus on this.
- Our manual is specific to articulating a warning if at all feasible before using force.
- Our officers have a duty to intervene and this has been integrated into our training and culture and although it is already part of our code of conduct it is also being added to our use of force police for absolute clarity.
- We also have in place, the use of a force continuum and comprehensive report writing.

I have to emphasize that the key to any of this being successful is crucial attention to detail in the following: training, discussion, monitoring, and enforcing. Transparency is critical and I will draw your attention to our performance measures including a use of force measure for both the jail and patrol. We use force in less than a quarter of a percent of police contacts; this is less than 1 out of every 400 police contacts. This means many officers will go several years without using any force at all. This is a tremendous testament to the quality of our staff but also highlights how imperative it is that we continually train those skills with the staff. These are considered low frequency, high risk events. When an officer does not possess the confidence or skills to manage a physical confrontation, they are more likely to use excessive force, even deadly force. We need to make sure our officers have the skills to avoid this when possible.

We have published a [strategic plan](#) early in 2020. I would advocate that you take this time to review the document for orientation. I want to highlight that the four priorities we have focused on in the plan are imperative in this time.

- **Public Safety-** Getting to the location of an emergency and having the ability to help
- **Community Engagement-** Being present in an effort to truly know the community we serve and to be a resource to problem solve
- **Effective and Efficient Services-** This includes operational dashboards that will publicly track use of force incidents and other key performance indicators for the Sheriff's Office.
- **Resource Sustainability-** Our biggest resource is our staff! They must be emotionally, technically, physically, and intellectually ready for service every day.
  - This takes being prepared, providing resources, coaching and oversight. It also takes our staff knowing that we care and trust them.
  - We also need to work hard in all areas of the community to talk to young people about being police officers—we need young people from all backgrounds to help shape the police force of our future. We need to understand more about how to encourage young people to apply and then how to encourage them to thrive when they are hired. We are engaging our community partners on this.

I appreciate the support and concern each of you have for ensuring that we are providing the right service to our community, and I assure you it is our number one priority. We will continue to lead the department.