

Just Voices



SPEAKING TRUTH. SEEKING JUSTICE.

Years of research, interviews, and study, have shown that Iowa has a problem with racially-biased policing. Just Voices is an initiative to raise victim's voices, speak their truth, and seek justice.

Benefits of a Citizen Review Board

Benefits

Citizen review boards (CRBs) help hold police officers accountable for misconduct through punitive actions. Often, the only ones who review complaints against the police are the police, and perhaps the station or a detective. The police are also responsible for any punishment for misconduct. Without accountability to the community, the police can continue any misconduct without consequences. A citizen review board ensures accountability to the people that the police are supposed to serve.

How Citizen Review Boards (CRBs) Got Started

Citizen review boards started in the 1950s in Philadelphia and New York City. Although both boards failed due to lack of funding and the inability to hold independent hearings, the citizen review boards received more complaints than the police department. This shows that when misconduct occurred, the police were not investigating complaints as legally required.

Are Citizen Review Boards Necessary?

Yes! In addition to providing accountability, citizen review boards simplify the process of filing a complaint. People may also be more likely to file a complaint to a review board because it is made up of community members, which is less intimidating than the police. Tracking an accurate number of complaints may identify police officers who are discriminatory and hostile towards citizens. By having a review board, the process is impartial, with consequences for misconduct and affirmation of appropriate conduct, which results in improved public trust of the police.

Why Some Police Departments Oppose CRBs

Police unions push back on citizen review boards because they think that civilians, who haven't been trained as police officers, aren't qualified to provide oversight. Unions may assume that review boards lack an understanding of the job. The goal for review boards is to strengthen the

relationship between the public and law enforcement. However, law enforcement may believe that review boards create a divide between the two because the review boards will only expose them for their misconduct and not shed light on what they are doing correctly. In turn, they believe that their job will be harder to do.

What's the ideal make-up of a CRB?

After Michael Brown was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, the U.S. Dept of Justice got involved to study and audit the Ferguson Police Department's policing policies and history. Many racial disparities were found and the DOJ issued a Consent Decree outlining the things that the Ferguson Police Department must change and by what date. One recommendation was for a Civilian (or Citizen) Review Board. The decree loosely defined WHO should sit on the board simply stating the board should be "... representative of the broader Ferguson community by reflecting the racial, ethnic, geographic, and housing diversity within the region, considering the applicants willing to serve on the CRB."

The Ferguson Consent Decree also specified who should NOT be on their CRB as: "(a) current or past employees of FPD; (b) current City employees; (c) any person convicted of a felony in this state or any other state;"

But by definition, it's obvious the majority of any CRB should be made up of everyday citizens, being sure they are properly trained to perform investigative oversight.

What makes a CRB effective?

According to an article by Olugbenga Ajilore on [Scholars Strategy Network](#) website there are currently nearly 150 oversight boards or civilian-police oversight agencies operating in the United States [and] are primarily associated with large municipal police agencies.

The most effective citizen review boards, like the one in Washington, D.C., have these operational characteristics:

- **Independence** from law enforcement – which is necessary to ensure unbiased reviews of cases.
- **Authority** to either discipline officers or recommend discipline of officers that department leaders will then enforce.
- **Sufficient resources** of funding and manpower to effectively oversee departmental activities.

For more information on racially-biased policing, visit our website www.justvoices.org.