

Police Reform Committee Meeting Minutes 10/30/20 10:30 AM

Attendees:

Madison County Sheriff Todd Hood
Madison County Administrator Mark Scimone
Madison County Attorney Tina Wayland-Smith
Georgetown Supervisor Pete Walrod
City of Oneida Supervisor Mary Cavanaugh
Captain William Wilcox, Madison County Sheriff's Office
Rev. Mick Keville, Crossroads Community Church
Chris Lewis, Chairman of the Board at Oneida Baptist Church and Inmate Counselor at Madison County Jail
Pastor Jeff Leahy, Church on the Rock
Madison County Assistant District Attorney Robert Mascari
Dave Desantis Esq., Criminal Defense Attorney
Teisha Cook, Director of Madison County Mental Health
Brian Frank, NP with Madison County Mental Health & Madison County Jail
Mary Margaret Zehr, Superintendent of City of Oneida School District
Madison County Public Information Officer Samantha Field
Secretary to the Board of MC, Emily Burns

Sheriff Hood gave an introduction and explained that the Public Comment period was opened to Residents and he would like to address some of the questions and concerns that were brought to attention.

Below are questions that were raised during the public comment period about the Madison County Sheriff's Office.

- *Do members of the Madison County Sheriff's Office receive any training on how to handle mental health situations?*
 - o The Madison County Sheriff's Office Criminal Division is accredited by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Service. Part of that accreditation deals with training.
 - o Our deputies receive the following training in this area:
 - Mental Health Training – 14 hours in the academy
 - Implicate Biased Policing – in academy and yearly training for patrol and supervisors
 - Excited Delirium – yearly review

- Most of the time, this is induced by someone taking excessive drugs and overdosing. MSCO knows how to get them appropriate medical care in that situation.
 - Cultural Diversity training – 8 hours in academy
 - Transgender – yearly review
- The Madison County Sheriff's Office also has deputies and supervisors who specialize in areas of mental health, the elderly, dementia and special needs. These deputies work hand in hand with social workers and therapists on calls and cases.
- The Madison County Jail has on staff a full-time social worker and a part-time psychiatric nurse practitioner to deliver mental health services to inmates.

Sheriff Hood then turned to Teisha Cook for the following question:

- *What is a Crisis Intervention Team?*
 - A group of **experienced** officers specially trained, on a **voluntary** basis, to deal with emotionally disturbed individuals in a variety of situations in the community.
 - These situations may include suicidal persons, persons exhibiting irrational behavior, handling psychiatric patients, the homeless, addressing various mental health concerns and/or referrals, and any other situations that deal specifically with the needs of the mental health community and emotionally disturbed persons.
 - **40 hours of specialized training that includes:**
 - Indicators of Emotional Disturbance
 - Mental Illness-Signs and Symptoms
 - Communication Skills
 - Specific Mental Illnesses
 - Trauma
 - Role Plays
 - Mental Hygiene Law
 - Veteran's Issues
 - Elderly Mental Health
 - Mental Health Court/Probation
 - Juvenile Mental Health
 - Police Stress/Mental Health
 - Medications
 - Suicide
 - Community Resources
 - Family Members and Personal Stories

- In 2016 and 2017, the Madison County Mental Health Department hosted a CIT team training; the training was offered to all police departments in Madison County. Several police departments have trained CIT officers, including the Madison County Sheriff's Office. The CIT team also includes representatives from local behavioral health agencies (Madison County Mental Health, Family Counseling Services, Liberty Resources and others). The team meets monthly to discuss high needs individuals that the police have had contact with, and to discuss potential service referrals that can be made if the individual is interested. In 2020, the Mental Health Department planned to host another CIT training, but due to the pandemic, this will be offered in 2021. Our hope is that as many officers as possible can be trained in order to de-escalate mentally ill individuals in the community and to avoid jail or unnecessary hospitalizations.
 - Lastly, the CIT team and police work closely with Liberty Resources Mobile Crisis Program. The purpose of the Mobile Crisis program is to de-escalate and address mental health crises in a person's home versus in the hospital. The Mobile Crisis Team can be dispatched via the Madison County Mental Health Department, or any police officer can contact them directly if they are interacting with a mentally ill individual in crisis. The hours of the mobile crisis team are 5pm-12am. During day time business hours, the Madison County Mental Health Department is contacted directly by individuals, or by local police who may have concerns, and department staff work with the individual to de-escalate the situation.
- *Many believe community responders, not police, are better equipped to handle situations where a person's wellness is concerned (mental health, homeless person, elderly neighbor, etc). What is your response to this?*
- When someone is out of control while on drugs or during an abuse situation, usually the first individual on the scene is a member of law enforcement. This is because the situation may not always be clear until someone arrives on scene. In some cases, it is unknown what we are responding to. You do not know if that individual is harming someone else or themselves. Madison County Sheriff's Deputies are trained to de-escalate the situation verbally. Deputies work hand in hand with social services, caseworkers, mental health and our EMTs to bring them into a situation if they are needed. It does not make sense to put a caseworker or counselor in a dangerous situation. Once people are out of harm we make sure to get them the proper care they need.
 - Teisha Cook explains that throughout the day, the public or police do notify them on concerns of an individual or in an emergency situation and then the Mental Health Dept. does outreach. On off-hours, the crisis intervention team can act independently of the Sheriff's Office if necessary.

- Bob Mascari explains that there is an understandable but common misconception that police are sent to a scene to escalate a situation when in reality, the main goal of the police is to de-escalate a situation. This is done by starting with the lowest level of force needed and to make the scene secure so that people from the Mental Health Dept. can provide assistance safely and effectively. Safety is the #1 priority.
 - The Sheriff states that de-escalation is the first thing they try to do when on scene.
 - Also, our deputies are trained in basic first aid, CPR and other live saving techniques. They are the first line of life saving techniques until the EMTs can arrive.
 - The Madison County Sheriff's Office is always lobbying Albany for legislation and funding to help with other means of assistance and care for those who suffer from mental health issues that are outside of policing.
- *Use of Force Policy needs to be changed.*
 - The Madison County Use of Force Policy can be found here: <https://www.madisoncounty.ny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/12908/Use-of-Objectively-Reasonable-Force>
 - Madison County Sheriff's Deputies are trained in de-escalation at both the academy and then a refresher course is taken every year.
 - The Use of Force is a pyramid. Madison County Sheriff's Deputies are trained to use verbal forms of de-escalation and non-lethal forms of force before resorting to any physical forms of force. Use of deadly or physical force are only used when it is a last resort or the life of the officer or others are in danger.
 - Beginning with the presence of the police itself is a use of force, verbal commands, resistance, and aggravated resistance. Police agencies across the country follow this continuum. Every year the MSCO is trained on this so they remain in compliance.
 - Supervisor Cavanaugh asks how this training looks every year.
 - Sheriff Hood explains that there is an in-service where the State Police will take over MCSO calls for the two day training period and the MSCO will do the same for the State Police. This is done so that every deputy has availability to go through training.
- *It is important that our youth have a positive impression of law enforcement. Is the Madison County Sheriff's Office out in our community? Do they do community outreach?*

- The Madison County Sheriff's Office throughout the year does different programs in the community, many of which are with our youth. We are always looking for additional ways to interact with the community.
 - [Project Lifesaver](#)
 - [Car Seat Safety Checks](#) (partnered with Health Department)
 - CRASE training (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events)
 - [Child Advocacy Center](#)
 - [Operations SafeChild Card](#)
 - Yellow Dot Program
 - [Bike Helmet giveaway](#)
 - Safe Halloween Trick or Treating
 - Special Patrol Officers in Schools across Madison County
 - Reading Day at schools
 - [Sheriff Summer Camp](#)
 - Christmas Angel Tree (partnered with DSS)
 - Shop with a Sheriff
 - Sheriff Hood explains that this is not an all-inclusive list for the programs that the MCSO takes part in throughout the year.
 - The Madison County Sheriff also attends the monthly Superintendent of Schools meetings.
 - This give teachers a chance to communicate any concerns they may have and opens a line of communication with the Sheriff's Office.
 - The Madison County Sheriff's Office is present in many community parades and at ceremonies as well for events such as Memorial Day, July 4th, Veterans Day, and winter holidays.
 - The Madison County Sheriff's Office is in constant contact with the community through social media. We answer questions, follow up on tips, and receive countless appreciation messages. In the past two years, the Madison County Sheriff's Facebook Page has doubled the number following to nearly 9,000.
 - This opens a line of communication with the Sheriff's Office as well.
- *Will you be forming a Citizen Review Board? How does someone put in a complaint about the department or a deputy?*
- Sheriff Hood asked Captain Bill Wilcox to elaborate on this topic.
 - Captain Wilcox states that if someone wants to file a complaint they can call the Sheriff's Office directly. Every complaint is taken very seriously and will be investigated. We understand that everyone may not feel comfortable if they have a complaint with a specific deputy. However, we ask you to please not feel that way, we will do everything we can to take care of your complaint and resolve it.

- Sheriff Hood further explains that if anyone has a complaint they can also file a complaint with any Deputy. They have all received training on this and it will be brought to attention.
 - At this time, the Madison County Sheriff's Office does not have and is not looking to create a Citizen Review Board. This is something that is set up for police agencies that are for more densely populated areas and cities. The Madison County Sheriff's Office works hard to be a presence in the community and hold open dialogues. If anyone does have a concern or a complaint about the department or a particular deputy they are free to contact the sheriff's office directly.
 - All complaints are addressed and will be resolved, there is always somewhere higher up that it can go if necessary.
- *Mental Health of deputies and First Responders is also important to think about. Is this a priority of the department?*
 - The mental health and wellbeing of our deputies and staff is a top priority. It is no longer taboo to take care of your mental health. We take this matter very seriously. The department offers counselling services, as well as the Madison County EAP. If someone does not feel comfortable using our in house services they also have the ability to use those of the New York State Police Troop D.

The Madison County Sheriff's Office's top priority is the safety and well-being of the residents of Madison County. Our agency is always looking for additional training, for ways to improve our skills, and to be a positive presence in the community.

Sheriff Hood explains that if a deputy receives a training that really helps them and changed their outlook then they will look into it and bring it into their yearly training.

PIO Samantha Field explains that this is just a few things that have been addressed by the public. We would like to hear from the Committee if there is anything else they have brought up that we would like to have addressed. This is a great opportunity to educate the public on the trainings and support that is currently put in place for our Sherriff's.

County Administrator, Mark Scimone asked Samantha to state how many responses were received and where they came from during the public comment period.

- Samantha explains that 44 Public comments were received either by mail or via online form. As well as an additional 72 comments from the Hamilton Area Anti- Racism Coalition. They created their own questionnaire, filled it out and sent it in as well as a summary of responses on their part. The FAQ came from re-occurring questions that were brought up.

Supervisor Pete Walrod asked the Sheriff to further explain what the Accreditation means and what it involved.

- Sheriff Hood explained that when he came into office, the Jail was accredited through the New York State Sheriff's Association but we were not yet accredited in the Criminal Division. With the assistance of Mike Courier, in 1 years' time working with Christina Rotella, got the Criminal Division accredited with the State of New York.
 - There are 110 standards that need to be met to be accredited. When you believe that you have met those standards, they send in a team from across the state to evaluate your department. The team will review policies, procedures, interview Deputies, records, training protocols and more.
 - MSCO is one of the 140 accredited agencies out of 500+ agencies in New York
 - Accreditation is good for 5 years.

Bob Mascari pointed out that of the 87% response from Hamilton area, most responses had either a neutral or positive experience with Police.

Sheriff Hood expresses that there is good reasoning for why and how things are done. He believes that there is misinformation out in the public on how situations are handled and education is something they take every opportunity to do.

- Mary Margaret Zehr pointed out that every senior in High School has to take a Government Class and this could be a great opportunity for Police Officers to come in and educate youth on how Police Departments work.

Supervisor Corbin asks how the chain of command works in severe situations when multiple agencies are needed

- Sheriff Hood explains that in Madison County it is whoever the closest car is. There is then a tactical command over that situation. Then the situation is evaluated by the agency in control and it could be turned over to an agency with more resources as needed.

Discussion continued on how well the Emergency Management Alert System has improved in notifying people in the event of an incident.

Discussion continued on body cameras for Officers. Sheriff explained that they have a few currently and the Officers think that it's a great tool and they like them a lot. Unfortunately, the reasoning we don't have them for each Officer is solely based on cost. With COVID-19 and budget cuts, we can't afford this yet.

What comes next?

1. The Plan will be drafted
2. The committee will reconvene to go over the drafted plan
3. Public comment will then be opened again once draft is released