



April 30, 2021

**VIA EMAIL**

The Albany Common Council  
City Hall  
24 Eagle Street, Room 206  
Albany, NY 12207

**Re: Request for City Code Amendment to Address Problems at  
Community Police Academy**

Dear Members of the Common Council:

As you know, the Community Police Review Board (CPRB), has made several recommendations for changes to the City Code relating to the powers and responsibilities of the CPRB and the Albany Police Department (APD). Previous recommendations can be found on the CPRB's webpage at <https://www.albanycprb.org/home/policy-recommendations/>.

We respectfully write now to ask for an amendment to the City Code that would delete the requirement that CPRB members complete the Community Police Academy, in light of an incident in which a presenter at the Academy made racist statements as part of the training. CPRB members should not be required to complete this program until the Common Council can be assured that racist myths are no longer part of the "education" it offers.

***1. Detective Lieutenant Schechter's Statements***

On April 14, 2021, I attended a session of the Community Police Academy, along with Melody Harkness, the CPRB's Program Manager, and Victor Person, who serves with me on the Board. The presenter, who I understand was Detective Lieutenant Howard Schechter, made several racist and disparaging remarks about

the black community during his presentation which led to me correcting him and ultimately, Melody and I walking out of class.

Throughout the class, he made several pejorative comments about the South End and Arbor Hill neighborhoods, referred to victims of sexual assault as “promiscuous”, and while referring to a certain officer-involved shooting stated that it was “the only bad one” in his opinion. Additionally, he included several graphic images, mostly of bloodied and beaten black and brown bodies, and displayed them without any sort of trigger warning.

Near the end of his presentation, the presenter started to remark on police reform and how in the current climate many are focused on officer involved shootings. He then made the statement that “they” only care when a cop shoots someone but “they don’t care” about the hundreds of other shootings when they are killing each other. I interjected and told him that the statement was not true and that the black community absolutely cares about all the lives that are lost to gun violence and work hard everyday within our community to prevent all killings. He responded, now raising his voice, that he doesn’t see “Alice Green” complaining when “they’re killing each other”. After I objected further, he said that “they” wouldn’t get killed if they just followed lawful orders.

The conversation continued, and the presenter made further problematic statements, including: the officer that stated that black people are the worst race “was not the start of the problem” and that “them” killing each other is the start; and that he has “always said that there are more drugs on SUNY’s campus than in Arbor Hill but they’re not killing each other at SUNY.” Eventually Ms. Harkness and I left. I understand that after we left, the presenter became angrier and stated that he didn’t know how we were put in charge of the CPRB because we don’t like to hear other’s views.

Most troubling is that upon reporting the incident to the rest of the CPRB, I learned that the same officer had made similar comments in a CPA class about four years prior and that another Board Member had formally complained about him. Despite the bold display of his racist sentiments, APD continues to employ him, allow him to collect and handle evidence, and spread his views to the public while representing APD.

## ***2. The Racist Myth of “Black-on-Black Crime”***

As you are no doubt aware, the idea that communities of color don’t care about “Black-on-Black violence” is an old white supremacist talking point, and a lie. It implies both that Black people are prone to violence and that they lack ordinary human compassion for their neighbors who are victimized by violence. In other words, it paints us as animals, violent and uncaring.

The “Black-on-Black crime” talking point is not only racist; it is false.<sup>1</sup> As the Council well knows, people of color in Albany have been working passionately and diligently to reduce violent crime for generations. A simple Google search would have showed him that just within the last year, Alice Green, for example, has been leading our community’s response to last summer’s surge in gun violence.<sup>2</sup> The presenter’s words were an effort to deny these efforts, and all of the work being done by people of color to reduce violence, and to paint police officers as the only ones who care about Black victims of violence. Hearing a police officer minimize and deny Black communities’ work to lionize himself and his colleagues was an insult to every person of color who has worked so hard to help our communities.

Moreover, the “Black-on-Black crime” talking point uses a statistical trick to falsely portray Black people as crime-prone. Why, racists ask, is so much of the violence against Black people is committed by other Black people? Because our society is a *de facto* segregated one.<sup>3</sup> As long as we have “Black neighborhoods” and “white neighborhoods,” and most social interactions are between people of the same race, violence will be likewise segregated. What racists portray as evidence of Black criminality is in fact evidence of segregation: 84 percent of white victims are killed by white people, and 93 percent of Black victims are killed by Black people.<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact that these percentages are statistically indistinguishable, we never hear racists complaining about “white-on-white” violence. Instead, they use these statistics to imply that Black people have a uniquely criminal nature—one of the oldest and most vicious lies racists tell.

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<sup>1</sup> See Shirley Carswell, “[What the ‘black-on-black crime’ fallacy misses about race and gun deaths](#)” (Washington Post, July 8, 2020) (“The “what about black-on-black crime” rejoinder usually is meant to imply that African Americans are indifferent to the thousands of young black men — and increasingly, black children — who are slain every year in gun violence. It insinuates that black people blithely accept killings by our own that have racked some communities for decades and take to the streets only when white police officers are doing the killing.”).

Moreover, “Black adults in the U.S. consistently express more concern than white adults about crime.” John Gramlich, “[From police to parole, black and white Americans differ widely in their views of criminal justice system](#)” (Pew Research Center, May 21, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> See Alice Green, “Commentary: Community interventions can break the cycle of violence,” (Sept. 20, 2020), <https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/Commentary-Community-interventions-can-break-the-15601359.php>; see also <https://www.wamc.org/post/top-albany-county-officials-launch-new-effort-prevent-youth-violence>.

<sup>3</sup> See Victoria M. Massie, “[Why ‘Black-on-Black Crime’ Isn’t A Valid Argument Against Criticizing Police Brutality](#)” (Vox.com, July 12, 2016); Lauren Williams, “[OK, Fine. Let’s Talk About ‘Black-on-Black’ Violence](#)” (Vox.com, Aug. 25, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> See Anthony A. Braga & Rod K. Brunson, [The Police and Public Discourse on “Black-on-Black” Violence](#) (*New Perspectives on Policing*, May 2015); see also Jamelle Bouie, [The Trayvon Martin Killing and the Myth of Black-on-Black Crime](#) (*The Daily Beast*, July 11, 2017).

As if racist myths weren't enough, the presenter's comments show a profound failure to understand what it means to be a police officer and to serve and protect the public. Murders by private citizens and murders by public servants are not the same kind of thing. When a private citizen murders someone, they commit a terrible crime, but they do not violate any public trust, because they do not work for the public. Police officers work for all of us. *Of course people protest differently when police officers kill people; we pay their salaries and they are supposed to protect us.* Anyone who can't understand the special outrage prompted by police killings does not deserve to serve the public as a police officer.

It was incredibly troubling to hearing this racist myth repeated at length by a representative of the Albany Police Department who had been designated to speak to the public on the Department's behalf as part of mandatory training for CPRB members. It also puts the members of the CPRB in an impossible position.

### ***3. Request for Amendment of City Code***

Section 42-339 of the Albany City Code says the following:

[G]raduation from the Albany Police Department's Community Police Academy (the curriculum of which shall include training in the laws applicable to public record concerns, internal affairs investigations, confidentiality issues and liability statutes; training in police procedures; participation in ride-alongs; defensive tactics training; firearms familiarization; and emergency vehicle operations) within six months of the start of the member's term is required."

Until the Common Council can be assured that the Community Police Academy is no longer teaching racist myths, it is inappropriate to require members of the CPRB to attend it. Accordingly, we ask for an amendment of the City Code that deletes the above language.

In addition, we request that the Common Council require the recording of Community Police Academy training sessions, so that future comments of this kind can be documented to allow a more effective response. We would suggest adding the following language to the City Code (it might fit in § 42-42):

All training sessions conducted as part of the Community Police Academy, except ride-alongs and others in which travel off-site, audience members' movement, or similar factors make recordings not feasible, shall be recorded and made available to any member of the public upon request.

***4. Recommendation for Suspension of the CPA Until All Content is Reviewed by Outside Consultant***

To be clear, thus far, the other CPA presenters have not demonstrated the same attitude as Det./Lt. Schechter. In fact, everyone else has been pleasant and professional. However, much of the content is biased, as explained in the correspondence from CPRB Program Manager to APD Office of Professional Standards, Chief Hawkins, and Mayor Sheehan, dated April 19, 2021 (attached hereto for your convenience).

Based on the fact that APD was previously made aware of Det./Lt. Schechter's racist comments and the need for objective content, we recommend that APD be required to hire an outside consultant, approved by the Common Council and CPRB, to help redevelop the CPA curriculum.

***5. Request to Call Detective Lieutenant Schechter Before the Public Safety Committee for Questioning***

Finally, we request that the Common Council Public Safety Committee call Det./Lt. Schechter before it to answer for his statements. He made frequent reference to his impending retirement and we request that he not be allowed to retire without being held accountable for his actions.

Our overall concerns about the content and experience of the Civilian Police Academy were brought to the attention of the Office of Professional Standards leadership, Chief of Police, and Mayor's Office. To date, we have received no response acknowledging the concerns about how the Albany Police Training Unit was represented in the Spring 2021 Civilian Police Academy.

We know the Common Council is extremely busy, and there are many pressing issues confronting the City. But we are concerned that CPRB members' ability to vote on pending cases may be questioned in light of the current requirement to complete the Community Police Academy. Accordingly, we respectfully ask the Council to take immediate action.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

Nairobi Vives  
*Chair*  
*Community Police Review Board*