



National Association of Black Law Enforcement Officers, Inc.
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August 5, 2016

Honorable Gina Raimondo, Governor
State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Governor Raimondo,

I was recently contacted by a community member to discuss the recent graduation of 29 new members of the Rhode Island State Police. It is my current understanding that this particular training class was, with the exception of one Hispanic male and one White female, comprised entirely of White males. It is also my understanding that more than 1,500 applicants were involved in the overall process resulting in their eventual appointments.

As well, in an article appearing in the Providence Journal on July 24th, it was mentioned that, of the 24 prospective recruits who dropped out of the training program, all persons of color who had originally entered the academy were among this number.

First and foremost, we find it woefully disappointing that there was not even one African American included among the recent graduates. Even more so when considering that, of the original 1,500 people who applied, there must surely have been more than two who were qualified.

While it is fully recognized that there is currently a strong disconnect between the law enforcement community and communities of color in all areas of the country, it must also be accepted that this disconnect becomes more stringent when those who are sworn to protect the community do not reflect the makeup of the community.

Consequently, my questions regarding this process must turn to the methodologies that are used to propel it. The most obvious of these would be when did the process start? How was it announced? To whom was it communicated? What information was distributed and where was it placed?

Research has shown that there appears to be a serious disconnect in the manner by which the recruitment for minority law enforcement candidates is conducted within the State of Rhode Island (Wilson, Wilson, Luthar, & Bridges, 2013; Wilson, Wilson, & Gwann, 2015; Wilson, Wilson, & Gwann, 2016). This disconnect includes a seeming lack of consideration for various cultural competencies that may be pertinent and unique to African American society, that are considered anathema to members of the majority culture of law enforcement, as well as the overall lack of sufficient numbers of racially diverse personnel. And while we commend the efforts of the State Police in their implementation of their recent "Diversity Academy", this must be looked at as a tree whose fruit will not soon ripen.

We must next determine whether the overall culture of the agency reflects the current state of recruiting technology. Was there a stronger emphasis placed on internal familiarizations, previous and more positive connections to the law enforcement community, or a reliance on strictly subjective concepts as opposed to objective concepts, during the selection process. These methods will invariably preclude candidates of color from the recruiting matrix.

Also of serious concern must be a consideration of the reasons which caused the departure of all candidates of color from the recruiting class. While it is quite conceivable, and indeed realistic, to consider that there would be a level of attrition amongst minority candidates, often due to an inability to properly acclimate to organizational culture or the failure of specific testing regimens. The departure of *all* candidates of color is both deeply concerning and problematic, and so should be questioned.

While my previous conversations on this issue with Colonel Steven O'Donnell have consistently indicated his desire and understanding of the need to embrace a more diverse pool of candidates, it must be recognized that when an agency's personnel do not adequately reflect the tone and nature of the community it serves, it provides strong indications and perceptions of an unwillingness to address community needs and concerns, racially biased hiring procedures, and a complete lack of connectedness with the community being served; thus often leading to formal complaints regarding agency practices. It may further indicate that any expressed initiatives towards community policing may be nothing more than "public speak" and have little or no true substance.

It is the connectivity with the community and the transparency of the recruiting campaign which directs the flow of applicants, not the mere notice that positions are open or available. It is the concerted effort to ensure that all possible stakeholders in the community are aware of the agency's need for expansion and of the method and procedure for engaging in the process that focuses the attention of those who are sought for these positions.

It requires "thinking outside of the box" in the conduct of the recruiting campaign, needing much more than mere visits to colleges and career fairs. It requires both structured communication with, and cooperation from, community leaders, faith-based groups, social and fraternal organizations, and the business community, as all are stakeholders in the efforts to keep the community safe. And it requires the publication and distribution of information in locations previously not considered but no less part and parcel of the targeted community, as it is the access to information that spearheads its use.

We urge the Rhode Island State Police to redouble their efforts in the recruitment of persons of color. We recommend a full, transparent and complete review of the methodologies used by the agency in their hiring practices, as well as their retention, promotion and disciplinary processes, each of which has both a direct and dynamic impact on the service of African American and Latino officers. We, as well, strongly urge the agency to make a more concerted effort to engage the community in their programs, as the very essence of any community policing initiative is the community, without which those efforts will undoubtedly fail. We welcome any opportunity to assist in these efforts.

The **National Association of Black Law Enforcement Officers, Inc.**, a 501.c.3 non-profit, is a premier national organization representing the interests and concerns of African American, Latino and other criminal justice practitioners of color serving in law enforcement, corrections, and investigative agencies throughout the United States, and the communities in which they serve.

Sincerely,

Lieut. Charles P. Wilson (Ret.)
Chairman, **NABLEO**

Cc: Col. Steven O'Donnell, RISP
James Vincent, Pres., Providence NAACP

References Cited

Wilson, C.P., Wilson, S.A., Luthar, H.K., & Bridges, M.R. (2013). Recruiting for diversity in law enforcement: An evaluation of practices used by state and local agencies. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*, 11(4), 233-255

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