

Manchester 7/ 21/2020

Dear members of the NH Commission on Law Enforcement Accountability and Transparency:

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this important subject.

My name is Eva Castillo-Turgeon, a longtime resident of Manchester. I work as an immigrant rights advocate and promoter of immigrant inclusion and integration all over the state.

I am presently back in the Manchester Police Commission after a three-year hiatus, having served from 2011 to 2017. I also coordinate and moderate the monthly meetings between police and community at the Manchester Police Department and chair the Manchester Racial Ethnic Disparities chapter. I attended the FBI Citizens Academy and the Manchester Police Department Citizen Academy. I can only speak of my own experience and a Latino immigrant; I do not have the experience of an African American person in this country.

Immigrants move to this country and carry with us a fear of police. In most Latin American, African, and other countries police serve as the arm of totalitarian, abusing regimes. Officers are corrupt and many times they are the criminals that extort, rob, or violate you. This fear is compounded by issues related to immigration status and the historic collaboration between some police departments and the federal immigration authorities. We have a deep mistrust of the police that is extremely hard to overcome.

In New Hampshire we have had examples of police departments that have gone out of their way to enforce federal immigration laws. In 2005 New Ipswich Police Chief Chamberlain and Hudson's Chief Gendron made national news by arresting undocumented immigrants that they encountered driving through their towns and charging them with trespassing. These charges were later dismissed by a district court judge ruling that they had overstepped their authority by trying to enforce federal immigration policy. These actions on the part of the police exacerbated the deep mistrust that already existed in immigrant communities. I never had any relationship with the police even though I worked giving services to the Latino community in Manchester for many years. I stayed away from them myself.

I started conversing with Manchester PD's Chief Mara about immigrant issues in 2009. The Chief started to bring together community leaders to talk about challenges and perceptions in dealings with the police. It was a long and sometimes uncomfortable process. People were eager to express their mistrust and dissatisfaction but eventually we were able to achieve some level of trust and mutual respect. The process of building trust is a work in progress. We get to know one another by talking and sharing our feelings and beliefs. It is a two-way education. Police learns about different communities and their issues and we learn about police. Chief Mara insisted the meetings were held at the Department's headquarters, he wanted people to feel comfortable coming to the building. When Chief Mara retired, Chief Willard and later Chief Capano continued the monthly meetings. We have been meeting every month since 2010. The Chiefs and officers have visited immigrant churches and organizations to get to know them and ease their fears.

I have seen the efforts that the MPD has put into reaching out to diverse communities and hiring people that reflect the makeup of the city. The PAL program is a wonderful example of creating positive relationships with law enforcement. Community policing is another great example of police reaching out to the neighbors and building trust.

In my opinion, we, the ethnic leaders, must work with the police to build bridges that will lead to better relations and safer communities. I have learned a great deal about police and how they do their work by talking to them, and I have seen the positive outcomes of coming together and establishing dialogue. Not all police departments are the same though. Organizations tend to take on the spirit of their leader. If the Chief does not believe in making stronger, healthier relationships with the community it is very unlikely that his officers will put much effort into it. This should not act as a deterrent but give us another reason to reach out.

Are things perfect? No, nothing ever is. We are dealing with many personalities and beliefs and the Chiefs cannot be everywhere and supervise every officer. This is another reason why it is so important to build relationships to create trust and respect. If the Chief knows me and respects me, I will have more credibility when I bring up a problem. I am a strong believer that by coming together we can make things happen. Every person has their own perspective; we all see things through the lens of our own experiences and biases. One truth does not have to be wrong for someone else's truth to be right. Many times, we assume things from others, based on our own experiences, that turn out to be completely wrong when we see it from the other person's perspective.

The events of racial bias and violence committed by police against black people in other states are horrific and should be condemned by all. While none of these incidents have happened in NH there is no denying that racial biases and unequal treatment are a fact in all aspects of our justice system. This is a great opportunity to address them and design mechanisms to preempt anything like this from taking place in our state.

There definitely needs to be more diversity and implicit bias training. But the training is not going to go much farther unless it is accompanied by dialogue and continuous contact with the diverse communities. This is a process that takes time and commitment. It is tedious, frustrating, and sometimes painful work. It takes self-examination and making yourself vulnerable to yourself and to others. It is uncomfortable for both sides, because the other side has their own biases and misconceptions too. Both sides need to do their own work! Racism and biases are at the root of society and its institutions and it must be brought to the surface before we can work together to build systems that promote equity and inclusion.

People will trust police when they have a relationship with them, when officers are held accountable for their actions, when we do more than just put things on paper to cover the bases. When there is no tolerance for bigotry within the police departments. When BIPOC feel accepted, respected, and included, they will be more likely to join the police departments. When both sides come to the table to learn from one another with the sincere spirit of making things better for all.

**Personal interaction changes hearts and minds, a training only instructs you!**