

The City of Pittsfield's Police Advisory and Review Board welcomes the progress made by the recent signing of the Police Reform Bill into law. These critical reforms move our communities closer to justice, equity, and accountability.

Among the innovations in the new legislation, the creation of permanent commissions on the status of African Americans, of Latino/Latina Americans, of persons living with disabilities, of Black men and boys, in order to research the issues faced by these communities and to identify and advocate for solutions, are great victories for representation and inclusion.

The creation of a Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission, which will have the power to certify and revoke certification of peace officers in Massachusetts, and to create a database with this information, will be a great benefit to responsible law enforcement throughout the Commonwealth.

In addition, the new law prohibits the use of chokeholds, and stipulates that law enforcement officers will not be trained to use lateral vascular neck restraints, carotid restraints, or other actions that involve the placement of any part of a law enforcement officer's body on or around a person's neck in a manner that limits the person's breathing or blood flow. This will be a great help to the Police Advisory and Review Board as it continues to examine use of force policies and procedures. The Pittsfield Police Department has already done intensive work on reducing use of force incidents, and has focused specialized training on de-escalation through the implementation of the Integrated Communication, Assessment, and Tactics curriculum. The PPD remains committed to this ongoing process.

The new law also requires law enforcement agencies to participate in critical incident stress management and peer support programs to address police officer mental wellness and suicide prevention, as well as critical incident stress and its effect on public safety. The programs will include mental wellness and stress management pre-incident and post-incident education, peer support, and availability of and referral to professional resources and assistance. These provisions recognize the great mental and emotional stresses that police officers deal with on a daily basis. The Pittsfield Police Department is currently a leader in advancing many of these new requirements, including specialized training on critical incident stress management, mental wellness and suicide prevention, post-incident education, and professional referrals.

There are many more aspects of the new police reforms, but these are some of the highlights the PARB wished to make note of. The Pittsfield Police Advisory and Review Board looks forward to continuing its work with the PPD, and to being part of the city's efforts to implement these on-going steps toward just, equitable, and accountable community policing.