

## **Comments from the Community Regarding Police Reform & Reinvention Collaborative DRAFT Plan 2021**

- Could the Tioga County Dept. of Mental Hygiene provide training on mental health issues and response techniques on a regular basis to the police department? I think that would be much more effective in giving them the information they need to feel more confident in dealing with such situations. Having a mental health professional available (on call) to help them via the internet during a real mental health crisis would also be an improvement. The two of these supports to law enforcement would work hand in hand to improve the chances of successful interventions by law enforcement. –K.S. received on 2/3/2021 at 8:36 p.m.
- If Raia or other community members are that concerned with our Sherriff's in Tioga County all having body cameras, maybe all those people could band together and raise enough money to fund the cost and present these body cameras to the Sherriff. I feel our local Sherriff's are doing so excellent job as they are now. They train and update staff as necessary. I feel safe with or without video cameras. –R.A. received on 2/4/2021 at 6:31 a.m.
- Since it seems County Mental Health staff are unwilling to accompany Officers on calls, I suggest a position created where staff are hired for this task, of course funded by the State since the State is requesting said reforms take place. Should that idea come to consensus I believe my 12 years in human services work with people who have mental health issues, including 6 years in a high risk and crisis setting at the homeless shelter and day center in Ithaca, qualify me in a unique way to accompany officers on high risk and crisis calls where mental health services could prove valuable to officer and community safety. –M.F. received on 2/4/2021 at 8:49 a.m.
- Thank you for this opportunity to give you feedback on this important issue. Well, me and my wife Deborah have lived in Tioga County for over (40) years now. Raise our children here, and as they now are grown and moved on. Me and Deborah are still here on Academy Street, Owego. In all this time, we have had nothing but respect for Owego Police and the Sheriff's Office. We are so grateful for the job they do for us. We understand fully the risk they take every day when they go to work. It's sad to hear Sheriff Howard will be retiring. We think he has done a fantastic job. I hope we get someone dedicated to fill his shoes when he leaves. Also, in all this time living here, I've probably called on the police a handful of times, and they are and were always professional. We definitely do not want to defund our police department!!! We need them. Thank you each and every one of you for keeping us safe. –M.M. received on 2/7/2021 at 12:27 p.m.

- Thank you for your attention. There are two things I'd like to mention after reading the Draft PRRC Plan. It was encouraging to see the language "policies that allow police to safely perform their duties" used. Any "new" guideline that would infringe, in any way, on law enforcement's ability to do their jobs safely, regardless of good intent and despite the current emphases on bias and discrimination, is irrational. Safety first for our police. They need to be allowed to be safe, always. I noticed that, in response to a community member's interest in getting "different opinions to discuss issues," there was due diligence shown in expressing openness to efforts like this. Making it clear that this would be something the public would have to organize, rather than the Sheriff's Office, was wise. It was good to see the receptivity to but boundaries surrounding the idea of intentionally-diverse forums. –J.D. received on 2/14/2021 at 7:53 p.m.
  
- The Draft struck me as just going through the motions. Listening to Sheriff Howard bemoan that the jail is half empty was disturbing to say the least. In all the years that I was assigned to in-school suspension at OFA for a period a day, I never walked in to find no students there and complained that more kids weren't being punished. Yes, I wanted effective discipline. But an "empty" period meant the students were doing what they were supposed to be doing. Also, the report details the demographics. Yes, I know we have very few non-white students. But the percentage of non-whites in jail needs to be compared to the percentage in the population. And I am aware that small numbers skew percentages, but the report should detail the comparison. Any bias is important to each affected person. OFA had few black students during my career. But I remember reading an essay from a 12<sup>th</sup> grade black student who was able to be honest in what he wrote because I was the only audience and he talked about the harassment from male classmates from elementary school through to then. My heart broke for what he had to endure even though it wasn't physical. Also, although Sheriff Howard is "all about training," how much of that training is in de-escalation and bias? None of that is broken down in the draft. None of the "hothead" teachers were ever assigned to in-school suspension. Besides keeping order in the room, the monitor's other task was to calm down students who were sent there. Typically they were angry. The report doesn't say who in the Mental Health department didn't want to be involved. Funding should go to Mental Health to provide support staff for mental health calls. Tioga County could be a positive force if the leaders and the law enforcement would denounce such things as pepper spraying a 9 year old girl and saying what would be done differently here. One last thing. I have a cousin Lori who spent years in prison because of the mishandling of her by the police. She is mentally ill and has paranoia and

schizophrenia. She was living in Medicaid housing and didn't respond to her case worker. The case worker called my aunt and her husband, Ed. Lori had had a gun, had it taken away from her and then returned to her by the police despite her history. When Ed went to Lori's to find out what was happening, the police insisted on accompanying him. Instead of letting him deal with Lori, they pounded on her door and shouted "Open up. Police." Lori was petrified and shot above the door. She was tried for attempted murder and jailed. She missed her mother's and step father's funeral because of what the police did. It took years of effort for one of her brothers to get her transferred from the prison to a mental hospital. What did the police think was going to be her response when they pounded on her door? How was she to know that it really was the police? And with her mental illness who would expect her to be rational? Lori should never have been given the gun back and the police should have stayed quiet as back up. . . . How would the Tioga Sheriff's department handle such a situation? –J.D. received on 2/15/2021 at 1:30 p.m.

- I personally would be disappointed if the county spent thousands of dollars on very expensive "IPads" for communication with mental-health professionals who are untrained and seemingly reluctant to actively participate in training or real crisis intervention. Would there be a requirement that the Sheriff's deputies connect in every situation? What about the areas where there is no internet service--for example points in Evergreen Cemetery in Owego have no connectivity. What's wrong with connecting initially by "text" on cell phones to alert the mental health expert--followed by a return phone call? Save lots of time and money. – P.G. received on 2/14/2021 at 9:12 a.m.