

Deadly police shootings raise questions - Sacramento Bee, The (CA) - March 27, 2019 - page 3A

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A number of recent high-profile police shootings in Sacramento have resulted in deaths of African American men showing signs of mental illness.

In 2016, officers shot and killed Dazion Flenaugh, who was said to have undiagnosed bipolar disorder. Last September, police said **Darell Richards** - who was killed by police after he waved a pellet gun on Broadway Avenue - was spiraling down mentally. A month ago, in part of an explanation of why officers weren't going to face charges, Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert described how Stephon Clark had researched how to commit suicide before he was shot and killed by police in his grandmother's back yard in 2018.

The Sacramento Community Police Review Commission wants to make changes in response to the fatal shootings. The group says it wants police to post public reports every three months that detail all use-of-force incidents. They also want to change the rules governing use of force by police.

Commission Chair Karin Savage-Sangwan says her group wants public information released about the victims when officers use force so trends can be identified, such as force being used more frequently on mentally ill people or people whose first language is not English.

Nearly 40 percent of officer shootings in Santa Clara County between 2013 and 2017 involved someone who was mentally ill, the San Jose Mercury News reported.

The commission is also recommending the department's use of force general orders be amended to remove a sentence that says officers can use deadly force if "the officer reasonably believes that the suspect poses a threat of death or serious bodily injury either to the officer or to others," and replace it with a sentence that says officers can use deadly force "only as a last resort and when reasonable alternatives have been exhausted or are not feasible to protect public and officer safety."

The City Council discussed Tuesday the changes recommended by the Sacramento Community Police Review Commission but took no action.

The commission believes the change in policy language would require officers to first use non-lethal force options such as Tasers and bean bags instead of deadly force when possible, said Savage-Sangwan.

"(Officers would) take a breath, take a second and see if there's anything else they can use," Savage-Sangwan said.

Sacramento police officials are currently reviewing the department's entire use of force policy as they consider 49 recommendations from a California Department of Justice report, police spokesman Vance Chandler said.

When police do use force, the commission wants police to post a public quarterly report that includes: the type of force; type of injury to officer and suspect; date, time and location of the incident; officer unit and district station where force was used; officer's activity when force was used and subject's activity requiring the use of force.

The reports would also include the age, gender, race, rank of the officer, as well as how long they have been on the force and how long they worked for other departments. It would also require the race, age, gender, gender identity of the suspect, as well as whether they have a mental illness, cognitive impairment, developmental disability, drug and alcohol use and whether they are homeless.

Police frequently release basic information about use of force incidents the day of the incident or the day after, including type of force, time and location of force, and how many officers were involved as part of its daily activity log, Chandler said.

The department does not release gender and age of officers involved in use of force incidents, though, even if a Public Records Act request is filed, Chandler said.

As far as suspect demographics, the department sometimes releases toxicology results or whether the suspect was homeless, but depending on the situation, the department does not always have that information, Chandler said.

The commission also recommends the police adopt a series of requirements to increase diversity, including increased recruitment for minorities; priority given to applicants who grew up in Sacramento or have lived here more than 10 years; incentives to officers that live in the city limits; more diverse training officers; and including "diversity hiring" as part of the chief's annual performance review.

A June 2016 city audit revealed that just 14 of the department's 607 police officers were black, 70 were Latino and 47 were Asian. It also showed that 101 of the department's 127 command staff members were white.

A year and a half ago, the police launched a series of programs aimed to increase diversity and improve community relations, Chandler said.

Among them, police hold boot camps in neighborhoods like Oak Park and Del Paso Heights to get interested applicants from minority neighborhoods instead of just holding them at police headquarters, Chandler said.

"It's us taking an extra step to go out and reach out to them and we feel that it's very valuable," Chandler said.

The City Council discussed the recommendations during its meeting Tuesday.

Mayor Darrell Steinberg said Tuesday he wants the council to vote on the change use of force policy language in a few weeks, after he meets with police officers and community leaders."I want all our colleagues to land on something that is consistent that supports reform and change that doesn't at city level lead to prosecution of more officers, that's not the point, but has better chance of keeping the community and officers safer."Councilman Larry Carr said he wants the council's ad hoc committee to discuss the matter first.

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