

Police review plan gets mixed reaction

Advocates say board is good, but inadequate

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Advocates for an independent police accountability board say proposed legislation drafted by the city council is a significant step, but falls well short of addressing their concerns about how citizen complaints are handled.

The proposal, released earlier this week, would create an independent agency to investigate misconduct complaints against members of the Rochester Police Department. The 9-person board would have subpoena power to compel testimony and the production of evidence, and recommend disciplinary action to the police chief.

The Rev. Lewis Stewart, president of United Christian Leadership Ministry, said the power to discipline must not remain with the police chief, and that the process shouldn't take a backseat to the department's own internal investigations.

"The community needs to view the board (PAB) as not under the thumbs of the police but having integrity, independence and authority," Stewart said Thursday morning.

Alex White, a local businessman and



The Rev. Lewis Stewart speaking about the suspensions of two RPD officers in the Christopher Pate case. SEAN LAHMAN/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

former candidate for Mayor, said that the detailed processes outlined in the proposal would make it difficult for a PAB to meet time limits for disciplinary action mandated by the police union's contract.

"The way the process is set up, it will

greatly impede the ability of the PAB to meet these deadlines," White said. "If they cannot meet these deadlines they will be unable to effectively do their job."

White says the board as proposed would effectively do nothing more than double check the work of the depart-

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ment's Professional Standard's Section. "Without changes [to the proposal], this will be a worthless board," White said.

Stewart also took issue with the way that the members of the board would be chosen. The proposal calls for the mayor to appoint 2 members, city council to appoint 4, and 3 to be nominated by community organizations.

But Stewart expressed optimism that this was an important step towards true reform on an issue which he has worked on for nearly four decades.

"We must push for a stronger draft, but I still see this as hope because before we didn't have this," Stewart said. "There is hope on the horizon and I see it, but the community needs to keep pushing City Council (to be) responsible to the concerns and needs of the peo-

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