Introduction

Ultimately public safety relies on the community’s willingness to build more trusting and tolerant relationships. Against the background of the pandemic, economic suffering, polarization, and social disruption, this forum focuses on three trends: (1) adoption of a structure to improve relations between parts of the community and the Madison Police Department by employing an Independent Monitor, who is chosen and supervised by a Civilian Oversight Board composed of residents of the city drawn from a wide diversity of backgrounds, geography, and life experience; (2) Dane County plans for criminal justice reform, often drawing on leadership by the Criminal Justice Council; and (3) community-based efforts to resolve conflicts with a minimum of resorts to punishments.

Discussion Questions

1. What alternatives or changes are needed to the traditional justice system in Dane County? What problems should such changes address?
2. How do we get from here to there?
3. In a non-life-threatening situation, how do you decide when to call the police? If you knew of a non-law-enforcement service to call, rather than the police department, would you use it? If not, why not?
4. Certain new terms, such as “defund the police”, “citizen oversight”, and “structural racism in justice systems”, imply criticism of policing and justice system practices. What do these terms mean to you? Are you comfortable using them?
Action Items

1. Call or write the county executive, your mayor, county board supervisor and/or alder to support one of the proposed programs and funding for community safety, a Community Justice Center and/or other program to address community justice.
2. Write a letter to the editor supporting one of the proposed programs and funding by the city or county related to community justice.
3. Compile a list of community resources or personal strategies you could use in non-emergency situations.

LWVUS Position

The League of Women Voters of the United States “supports violence prevention programs in all communities and action to support the primary prevention of violence, an active role of government and social institutions to prevent violent behavior and the allocation of public monies in public money for violence prevention.” You can access the LWVUS Position on violence prevention here (see page 87).

LWV Wisconsin Position

The LWV of Wisconsin supports “Law enforcement policy locally developed by cooperative efforts of citizens and law enforcement agencies using state guidelines, but reflecting local needs.”

“There is a strong need for further development and primary reliance on alternatives to incarceration except for the most dangerous offenders. Citizen education and participation should play an important role in the reintegration of the offender into the community. Use of community based treatment centers and halfway houses should be expanded. Probation services should include professional staff, each with a reasonable number of cases, use of trained volunteer aides, paraprofessionals, and wider use of community resources through purchases of services by the Department of Corrections. Unnecessary and unenforceable restrictions on behavior should be eliminated. Pre-trial intervention should be used to provide rehabilitation alternatives to a criminal record for adults who commit minor offenses, particularly first time offenders, and those whose lack of income would ordinarily doom them to jail before trial.” You can access the LWVWI Administration of Justice Position here.
LWV of Dane County Public Testimony

Throughout the lengthy period of debate about the Independent Police Monitor, the Civilian Police Oversight Board, and other public safety topics, the LWVDC submitted several letters of support to city committees. You can access the summaries here.

City of Madison Independent Police Monitor/Civilian Oversight Board

Beginning in 2016, motivated by the deaths of Paul Heenan and Tony Robinson, the City of Madison commissioned two studies of the policies and procedures of the Madison Police Department. A third study was conducted by an alder work group. Links to the three studies are provided below:

Final Report of the President’s Work Group on Police & Community Relations (Adopted by the Common Council on 5/16/17)

The OIR Report on Madison Police Department Policy and Procedure (December 2017)

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Madison Police Department Policies and Procedures (October 2019)

On September 1, 2020, the Common Council approved an ordinance creating the Office of the Independent Monitor and the Civilian Oversight Board:

Madison General Ordinances ch. 5.19-5.20, adopted by the Common Council 9-1-20. Excerpts from the ordinance are provided below:

5.19 OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT POLICE MONITOR
(1) Creation and Purpose. There is hereby created the Office of the Independent Police Monitor (“OIM”) for the purpose of providing civilian oversight of the Madison Police Department (“MPD”) and ensuring that the MPD is accountable and responsive to the needs and concerns of all segments of the community, thereby building and strengthening trust in the MPD throughout the community. …

5.20 POLICE CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT BOARD
(1) Creation. A Police Civilian Oversight Board (“Board”) is hereby created for the City of Madison.
(2) Purpose. The Common Council recognizes that civilian oversight of the Madison Police Department (“MPD”) is critical to ensuring that the MPD responds to the needs and concerns of all segments of the community, thereby building and strengthening the
community's trust in the MPD's services. The purpose of the Board is therefore to provide within the City of Madison a body that is independent from the MPD, authorized to hire and supervise the Independent Police Monitor ("Monitor"), and required to work collaboratively with the Office of the Independent Police Monitor ("OIM") and the community to review and make recommendations regarding police discipline, use of force, and other policies and activities, including related to rules, hiring, training, community relations, and complaint processes. ...

For more about the Independent Monitor and the Civilian Oversight Board, read the entire Ordinance or see the discussion in the Madison Police Department Policies and Procedures Ad Hoc Committee Final Report, pp. 29-33.

Summer 2020: Community Responses to the Police

“...An activist group that is leading protest actions in Madison has called for the police to be abolished, especially in marginalized neighborhoods where people of color are concentrated. Elsewhere, activists are urging cities to hold the line on increasing police budgets and instead investing in education, youth development, health care, mental health services and other areas that could reduce crime, and thus the need for bloated police budgets. In between is an infinite realm of possibilities. But they all have one thing in common: reducing the resources spent on police, which have increased for decades, and diverting funds to social programs, which by any reasonable measure fall vastly short of the need." Cap Times, June 8, 2020.

Public Safety and Community Action in Dane County and Madison

Beyond the Protests: The Future of Madison Policing

Video from the Cap Times Ideas Fest 2020 - Speakers: Anthony Cooper (Nehemiah Center), Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, and Madison Police Department Officer Brian Chaney Austin, with former Police Chief Noble Wray (moderator). Spring and summer brought the issue of police reform to the forefront in Madison and across the nation. What can and should reform look like? The program begins about three minutes into the recording.
The Nehemiah Center
Nehemiah Center for Urban Leadership Development is the home for well-known and respected culturally competent and relevant programs to meet the needs of African American leaders as well as the general Madison population. Programs are designed to transform the many faces of leadership within our community, including Youth Empowerment and Leadership Development Programs, Family and Community Wellness, Economic Development, Reentry Services, and Urban Impact. Visit their website for suggestions on reading, viewing, listening, and taking action.

Dane County Criminal Justice Council (CJC)
The CJC website is an essential resource for Dane County’s plans for criminal justice reform. The Council includes six voting members, including the Presiding Judge, Sheriff, District Attorney, Clerk of Courts, County Executive, and County Board Chair, and non-voting members from law enforcement, municipal judiciary, and corrections. “Over the last six years, the Dane County CJC has partnered with criminal justice experts from across the nation to help inform and enhance policy decisions. The Criminal Justice Council has three formal subcommittees to assist policy and procedure analysis: the Pretrial Reform Subcommittee, the Racial Disparities Subcommittee, and the Behavioral Health Subcommittee.

A Town Hall Meeting of the Dane County Criminal Justice Council
Watch this video of panelists from the Criminal Justice Council introducing Madison and Dane County to the proposed Criminal Justice Center with local speakers, Dr. Alex Gee, President and Founder of the Nehemiah Center, State Representative Sheila Stubbs, and District Attorney, Ismael Ozanne, along with Judge Calabrese, presiding Judge of the Red Hook Community Justice Center in New York, and Brett Taylor, Center for Court Innovation in New York.

Triage Centers and the Crisis-Care Continuum
An hour-long Dane County Criminal Justice Committee meeting video shows how the Pima County, Arizona triage center has reduced costs compared to taking people with a drug or mental health crisis to jail.

Endorsing Criminal Justice Reform and Developing Both a Triage and Restoration Center and a Community Justice Center
The 2020 Res-180, adopted by the County Board on October 15, 2020, identifies 18 goals for criminal justice reform. However, the 2021 Dane County budget adopted in November did not include new funding for a Triage Center or for a pilot study of mental health interventions.
A few key excerpts from the resolution:

“Smart justice in Dane County will provide a way to address criminal justice issues that solve the problems of crime rather than simply punishing individuals: it addresses the profound connections of crime to mental health, addiction, employment, education, housing and social inclusion. Smart justice in Dane County will support victims and protect families, empower communities and improve safety through programs proven to reduce crime and help people lead fulfilling lives.

“A key reform, discussed locally and increasingly embraced by communities throughout the country, is a triage and restoration center to address mental health challenges both inside and outside the criminal justice system. A triage and restoration center is generally grounded in the concept of ‘no wrong door’ and individuals can access services by walking in, a referral from a community partner, or be brought by law enforcement. Care available at a triage and restoration center should be accessible, compassionate, and equitable.”

The report of the CJC Behavioral Health Sub-Committee includes further information about the Triage Center and Continuum of Care. The “Recurring Trends” on p. 4 and the Q&A on pp. 5-7 are very interesting.

Local Crisis Support and Violence Prevention


“When to Call 911”: Guidance for when to call an alternate number instead of 911, developed by Dudgeon-Monroe Neighborhood Association with the Madison Police Department.
Additional Resources

Defund the Police: Top 3 Pros and Cons, from Procon.org. A side-by-side presentation of arguments for and against certain changes in how policing works and is funded. Extensive bibliography. ProCon.org is a well-known resource for teachers.

“What’s Needed for Police Accountability After the Killing of George Floyd?” A podcast by Brookings.edu.