

The Columbus Dispatch

Who's who in push to reform Columbus police

By [Bethany Bruner](#)

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In the weeks after sometimes-violent Downtown protests and calls for police reform, the city of Columbus and Mayor Andrew J. Ginther have announced the creation of several groups, panels and boards to investigate police misconduct, help craft policy and develop institutions for the city.

The groups have some common goals but varying methods, members and costs. Here's a primer to help keep track:

CHIEF'S ADVISORY GROUP

This group, announced on June 17, consists of 14 members who will have a [direct line of communication with Columbus Police Chief Thomas Quinlan](#). The group, which was an idea that Quinlan had discussed developing prior to the late-May eruption of the protests, is "designed to allow community stakeholders to have a meaningful way to provide input into strategies, development of community policing practices and an increase in community transparency."

Members include: Tammy Fournier-Alsaada, an organizer with the People's Justice Project; Diane Menashe, a prominent local defense lawyer and partner in the firm Ice Miller; Andrew B. Pierce II, an undergraduate student at Ohio State University; Randall Sistrunk, the director of development for Orange Barrel Media; and Aba Azeem, the vice chair of the Create Columbus Commission.

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Fournier-Alsaada was also a member of the mayor's Community Safety Advisory Commission. She is the [lead plaintiff in a lawsuit](#) filed in U.S. District Court on July 9 by a group of protesters alleging rights violations.

The advisory group's members were appointed by Ginther and City Council and can serve up to three years, according to information provided by Ginther's office.

The group was scheduled to meet in early July, but the city determined that a facilitator was needed for the meetings. The city entered into a contract with RAMA Consulting Group, at a cost of around \$20,000, and meetings are to begin in the near future.

WORKING GROUP FOR REVIEW BOARD

Announced on July 1, the 16-member group was appointed by Ginther to [create the framework for the city's civilian review board](#).

This group will develop the operating procedure for the review board, including how the members will be chosen and what types of investigations it will conduct.

Members include Frederick Benton, a local defense lawyer; Stephanie Hightower, the president and CEO of the Columbus Urban League; the Rev. Frederick LaMarr, president of the local Baptist Pastors Conference and pastor at Family Missionary Baptist Church; Erin Synk, director of government relations for LNE Group; Nana Watson, president of the Columbus NAACP; and Anthony Wilson, a retired Columbus and Westerville police officer.

The working group includes no active member of law enforcement.



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Fraternal Order of Police Capital City Lodge No. 9 has called for Benton's removal from the group. The lawyer defended Quentin Smith, who was convicted of killing Westerville Police Officers Anthony Morelli and Eric Joering in February 2018. Smith could have faced the death penalty, but a jury spared his life.

SAFETY COMMISSION

Ginther and others in the city government selected a group of 17 to evaluate the city's policing and create recommendations for change. The commission, created in November 2017, released in January its final report, which included among its 80 recommendations a review board, the independent investigation of police-involved shooting, changes in training at the police academy, and technology changes.

The commission's official work has concluded, but its members continue to advise the council and mayor.

REVIEW BOARD

The board's creation is subject to a public vote in November on a proposed amendment to the city's charter. The amendment also would create the Department of Inspector General. The inspector general would be appointed by the board and have a paid staff.

The city has said that details about who would be on the review board, how they would be seated — by appointment, election or hiring — probably would be determined after the November vote.

Even if the public approves the charter amendment, the city would still need to negotiate with the Fraternal Order of Police for the board to have authority beyond providing recommendations to the chief and public safety director, who now have the final power over disciplinary and policy matters.

The charter amendment would provide for funding with taxpayer dollars.

CITY COUNCIL REFORMS

In its meeting Monday, the council approved reforms as part of a move to reimagine policing in the city. The changes include limiting the use of no-knock search warrants, limiting the types of military-style equipment that the police may buy and use, and banning officers from affiliating with hate groups.

OTHER INVESTIGATIONS

Investigations are being conducted into the responses of the police and the city to the protests, which started on May 28 in reaction to the death of George Floyd while in the custody of Minneapolis police days earlier.

— BakerHostetler, a local law firm, is investigating allegations of administrative misconduct by Columbus police during the protests. This investigation was initially restricted to citizen complaints of excessive uses of force and was to cost taxpayers no more than \$50,000. On Monday, the council increased the taxpayer cost to \$500,000 with limited discussion.

An internal police department email said the investigation has expanded to all uses of force during the protests, regardless of whether a complaint was filed. As of noon Tuesday, the city had not provided The Dispatch with a copy of a new contract to reflect the expansion of this investigation.

— Rich Wozniak, a retired FBI agent, has been hired by the city Department of Public Safety on a part-time, temporary basis to investigate potential criminal misconduct by officers during the protests. The city said Wozniak is being paid \$84 an hour.

– Carter Stewart, a former U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, and the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at Ohio State University have been tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of the city's response to the protests, including, for example, not only the police response but also communication between police and the community and city communication.

The investigation and review will include interviews with protesters, police and others involved in the response. The Columbus Division of Police is providing \$200,000 from its drug-seizure fund to help pay for the review. Approximately \$50,000 is being contributed from the city's general fund. The review is anticipated to be completed this year.

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