

Readers View: Democrats Against Racism. Lip Service No More.

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis has re-ignited anger, frustration and desperation and shone a spotlight on systemic racism. In response, we have seen thousands gather in protest and in support of Black Lives Matter.

While it is encouraging that people of all ages and races are joining together as allies across the Nation, we have much work to do.

Locally, we have made strides in conversations with law enforcement. In 2015, in the wake of the Darryl Mount tragedy, when I ran in a Democratic primary for Commissioner of Public Safety, I advocated for our need for a Civilian Review Board. On more than one occasion, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) offered assistance to our City which was repeatedly and stubbornly declined. Then finally in summer 2018, former Commissioner of Public Safety Peter Martin took a giant step in the right direction by forming a "Citizens Advisory Board." However, this unfortunately fell short and has recently been inactive.

First, this board lacks any real authority. A Civilian "REVIEW" Board should be established as an independent body free from bias and interference from the public safety department. The Board should have procedures for receiving, reviewing and commenting on completed investigations of complaints made by citizens against officers of our City for alleged misconduct. Fortunately, we do not need to look any further than the Cities of Schenectady or Albany for examples on how this can be done effectively.

In Schenectady, a Complaint process begins with their Office of Professional Standards which conducts an investigation and submits findings to the Civilian Police Review Board. The Board then reviews the complaint, findings and can request further investigation.

The members of their board include professional representatives from the NAACP, the Human Rights Commission, SUN, the Chamber of Commerce and the Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority.

Proudly, this week in Saratoga Springs, we saw our police officers, including our Police Chief, take a knee alongside protesters. This action is a positive step in establishing community partnerships and constructive dialog with residents.

As the current Chair of the Saratoga Springs Democratic Committee, I am appointing an anti-racism subcommittee, which will be led by committee members Natalya Lakhtakia and Joy King. Both bring a plethora of knowledge and experience and I am confident in their ability to help lead us accordingly.

As elected members of the Democratic Party we are committed to social justice and stand firm against racism. Through our subcommittee and in our work toward the ultimate goal of electing Democrats that honor our values, we will continue to advocate for real change in our community and beyond. Lip service no more.

If you have interest in learning more about the local Democratic party or any of our initiatives, please feel free to contact me at sarah.burger@saratogadems.org.

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