



Citizen Review Board Timeline

CRB Public Debate

March 19, 1997

March, 1996: Rep. Bill Robinson, Democrat, Schenley Heights, sends letter to federal officials asking for intervention because of alleged abuse against civilians by Pittsburgh police officers.

March 27, 1996: ACLU files suit on behalf of 25 individuals, the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP, and Parents Against Violence. Defendants: the city of Pittsburgh, Mayor Murphy, Deputy Mayor Sal Sirabella, and acting police chief William Bochter, 37 named police officers, and 31 officers identified as "John Doe." The lawsuit calls for the creation of civilian oversight of police, including subpoenaing witnesses, establishing clear penalties for proven misconduct and procedures for evaluating officers' performance.

April 1996: DOJ begins investigation of the City.

April 2, 1996: Councilman Sala Udin calls for CRB, public hearings about a CRB; Council delays Udin request pending review of ACLU lawsuit.

April 2, 1996: Robert W. McNeilly, a 19 year veteran of Pittsburgh police force is appointed Chief of Police. Mayor publicly acknowledges abuse by some police officers and claims that McNeilly can discipline the force, and mend relations between police and the community. McNeilly proposes a number of reforms and projects to improve police-community relations.

July 1996: City council hearings on CRB begin.

October 15, 1996: Councilman Alan Hertzberg introduces 2 measures to reform complaint procedures which he claims would lessen the need for a board. The measures would 1: give the city's Human Relations Commission the power to investigate complaints of misconduct by police, taking away oversight from the Public Safety Department and 2: let the city public safety director call in an outside agency, such as county police, state police, or the district attorney to investigate cases in which a police officer shoots someone. A third measure, which was defeated, would have called for at least half the employees of the Office of Municipal Investigations (OMI) to be civilians (the OMI is part of the Public safety Department.)

October 22, 1996: Council votes 5-4 against the creation of a CRB.

December 11, 1996: A measure to place the CRB on the ballot is tabled because supporters lack sufficient votes on the Council (Council could have voted to place it on the ballot; Udin and others decide to table while a petition drive gets underway)

January 1, 1997: Petition drive begins. Organizers need 10,339 valid signatures to get the measure on the May ballot. If voted for by a majority of Pittsburgh voters, the city charter would be amended to create a CRB (see attached wording from sample petition sheet).

January 16, 1997: County commissioner Bob Cranmer calls for creation of commission, composed of 12 to 16 members, divided equally among police officers, police chiefs, municipal officials and citizens to investigate charges of misconduct by the police. The commission would be a branch of county government, would have the ability to recommend disciplinary action against police officers to the DA, and would require police departments to conform to the training and operating procedures it sets.

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Timeline (Continued)

February 12, 1997: *Post-Gazette* releases information from DOJ report (that was never officially released to the public). DOJ finds pattern of police brutality that is ignored by city officials.

February 12, 1997: City reacts to DOJ report saying that investigators failed to acknowledge reforms implemented by Murphy administration and by Chief McNeilly. Reforms include: firing of officers guilty of brutality; stricter discipline; development of use-of-force police; extensive tracking of police officers' conduct; performance evaluation; intensive training in areas like cultural awareness and ethics.

February 13, 1997: FOP criticizes DOJ report saying that police officers were not interviewed (making it biased), and that the number of complaints is not high enough to warrant the consent decree.

February 17, 1997: Petition formally accepted by the city; organizers submit more than 20,000 signatures.

February 18, 1997: FOP begins investigation of petition signatures.

February 20, 1997: *In Pittsburgh* reports that at least two of the officers fired by McNeilly are back on the job.

February 24, 1997: 10 plaintiffs join ACLU lawsuit: 5 of which occurred since October 1996, one in January of 1997. *Post-Gazette* prints editorial calling for all sides to discuss and solve problems between police and community; supports city's reforms, says CRB unnecessary.

February 26, 1997: City settles with the DOJ by signing a consent decree. The decree required the City to implement a series of reforms, but does not require the creation of a CRB.

February 27, 1997: *Post-Gazette* reports on interviews with several officers who say morale is low. The perception is that support for the police is low and that the DOJ report fails to acknowledge reforms by McNeilly.

March 12, 1997: FOP asks to be included in consent decree reforms.