

SOMD Sheriffs Address Policing Reforms, 'Defund The Police' Movement Locally

Posted by [Zach Hill](#) On 06/22/2020

PRINCE FREDERICK, Md. — In light of recent events that have taken over the national spotlight regarding police brutality and concerns surrounding racial injustices, law enforcement across the country have found themselves in the hot-seat over several issues. Everything from the use of neck-holds, to use-of-force in general, to calls for politicians to "Defund the Police," has come up in public and private conversations in every corner of the United States.

And Southern Maryland is no exception.

On June 19, police officers from across the Southern Maryland region convened at the College of Southern Maryland in Prince Frederick to address recommendations for local police departments, some of which are already being implemented. Sheriff Tim Cameron[R] of St. Mary's, Sheriff Mike Evans[R] of Calvert, and Sheriff Troy Berry[D] of Charles County led discussions during what was a two-hour closed-door meeting, before finally addressing members of the press as a panel afterward.

One point of apparent emphasis stemmed from what Cameron described as a "shoulder pin," which is currently taught to officers as a method of restraining individuals who resist arrest under the most dire circumstances, which applies slight pressure to the side of the victim's neck and shoulder.

"The question is, amongst the sheriffs... Do we want that to continue," Cameron said before Evans chimed in to elaborate.

"And what we learned was that it was used very rarely among all three agencies in the last seven years," Evans said.

When asked, all three sheriffs noted that choke-holds are not used by their departments.

Berry made an effort to point out how his officers are taught "emotional intelligence" as a part of de-escalation training, another topic that is heavily embraced in the local police academy according to three sheriffs. Officers are trained to use a variety of tactics such as verbal de-escalation before use-of-force is ever supposed to be used.

"The one unique thing that we have in the Southern Maryland region is that we police as a cohesive unit," Berry said. "Just like [Sheriff Tim Cameron] said, we want to make sure that we have a unified use-of-force policy... We want to definitely address some of [our constituent's] concerns to those particular issues... In regards to choke-holds, neck-holds, duty-to-intervene. That's what this was all about. Now, we want to take all that information and go back and make some enhancements to our entry-level training, and also make some enhancements to our individual policies..."

Another question was raised about how [Prince George's County Police Chief Hank Stawinski recently resigned](#) over allegations of racial biases among officers in his department. All three on the panel agreed that they do not believe any prejudicial biases exist among their officers.

"In looking through our OPR and our records of discipline, there does not appear to be any bias in discipline, investigation, or charges," Cameron said before Evans and Berry signaled their agreement.

Arguably one of the most intriguing conversations that came up among the panel was about the national movement that has been growing to "Defund the Police." The movement, which has been viewed from the literal perspective of people who want to abolish the police, as well as people who want to slightly shift resources towards more community-oriented programs and away from police budgets, has gained some traction in several places across the country.

Minneapolis, Minnesota for example, the site where George Floyd was killed by a police officer on the street nearly a month ago, recently announced plans to disband their entire police department. In Maryland, Baltimore City Council recently proposed \$22 million worth of cuts to their police department budget amidst the movement. But how Southern Maryland will respond to the movement is still unclear, if they will respond at all.

Evans said he felt as though resources are already being diverted towards addressing problems near the roots, citing a "big jump" taken by the Calvert County Board of Education not too long ago.

"Schools have increased their mental health [professionals], and the number of nurses so they are getting to the problems earlier," Evans said. "We know we have more mental health issues, we have people from the health department involved... and [the Board of Education] have done that in the past two years."

Cameron also offered an insightful explanation about his thoughts on the movement seeking to divert his funding, including some emails he has received regarding it, and his willingness to still discuss it. See his full video remarks below:

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