

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Stephen Smith at 304.610.6512 or Lida Shepherd at 304.356.8428.

### **“Community Members, Charleston Police Department Unite to Address Racism & Increase Community Partnerships”**

*Plan includes trainings, youth engagement, arrest tracking, and body cameras*

CHARLESTON, WV – On Tuesday October 4<sup>th</sup> at 11am in Charleston City Hall, Charleston community leaders are joining with the Charleston Police Department to unveil an ambitious new 8-point collaboration aimed at building upon Charleston Police Department’s role as a national leader in the arenas of race relations, community policing, and youth engagement.

The plan includes a 8 major advances:

- **Implementation of De-Escalation training.** This includes having sent 5 CPD officers to become certified de-escalation trainers through the nationally accredited RITE curriculum, and a May training for every CPD officer that has already happened on de-escalation.
- **Publishing monthly arrest statistics across race, age, gender, and cause of arrest** – for the purpose of educating officers and citizens about crime trends and possible causes of racial arrest disparities.
- Starting in November, plans to implement state of the art **body camera technology** and national best practices for body camera use policy to make sure the devices are protecting both officers and citizens.
- The launch, this October, of a **Youth Advisory Council**, which will plan on-going dialogue and events between youth and officers, and will also make annual recommendations to continue to improve the relationship between youth and officers. The Youth Advisory Council will be made up of at least 10 young people, aged 18-25, across race and religious differences.
- **A department wide series of day-long anti-racism trainings for everyone from the Chief to new recruits**, conducted in partnership with the WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Race Matters in WV, American Friends Service Committee, and other partners.
- **A series of roll call presentations**, where officers get to meet and hear from community leaders across Charleston.
- A new annual **Community Service Award**, where community leaders will work with police officers to create community policing standards – and then recognize all officers meeting those standards in a given year. The award is designed to shine a spotlight on the existing community policing efforts (both formal, and informal) already in practice, and encourage officers to continue to improve upon those.
- Collaboration between Charleston Police Department leadership and community leaders to **advocate for state policy changes to address re-entry and recidivism** and to offer second chances for ex-offenders.

These advances build upon a strong foundation of community policing by the department, under the leadership of Chief Brent Webster and Corporal Errol Randle.

That track record includes previous advances such as Handle With Care, Project West Invest, and the RESET initiative.

Chief of Police Brent Webster: "The Charleston Police Department's success in providing great customer service to our citizens has much to do with our prioritized commitment to community policing. Our high level of engagement provides us opportunities to listen to diverse perspectives as well as understand the perception of our actions. Ultimately, my department is able to develop practices and initiatives that are both effective and efficient while exercising empathy and respecting human dignity. Community engagement is the bridge for the Charleston Police Department to be one with the community."

These joint efforts emerged from a series of meetings between the Charleston Police Department and a coalition – called Call to Action for Racial Equality (CARE) – of faith, student, legal, and citizen leaders interested in working to make Charleston a national leader in race relations, community policing, and youth engagement. The broad-based coalition included representatives from the American Friends Service Committee, the WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Race Matters West Virginia, the Kanawha County Public Defender's Office, the Black Lives Matter Student Chapter at WV State University, the Charleston Branch NAACP, East End Family Resource Center, Step-by-Step, Tuesday Morning Group, the ACLU of WV, the Black Ministerial Alliance, and the WV Healthy Kids and Families Coalition.

African-Americans in Charleston are arrested at a rate 2.4 times that of whites. Members of the coalition came together because they were frustrated by this disparity, a problem faced by police departments across the country. The coalition put together a series of two community forums in 2015 (over 150 people attended one at the East End Family Resource Center in June and over 110 more participated at West Virginia State in October). These forums were designed to absorb community concerns and begin to draft real, concrete proposals. In the end, members of the coalition envisioned a police force that would join with community leaders to improve race relations, encourage youth leadership and engagement, and deepen 21<sup>st</sup> century community policing practices. Over the course of 5 meetings with Charleston police leadership this winter, advocates learned that the Charleston Police Department shared that vision. From the start, CPD leaders were enthusiastic to find community allies who wanted to improve the relationship between police and communities.

Stephen N. Smith, the director of the WV Healthy Kids and Families Coalition, and CARE co-chair, remarked: "Future historians will ask us what we did, what action we took, in response to the racism and violence that are tearing our country apart. Today, in Charleston, WV, we are taking real action."

Takeiya Smith, a criminal justice major at WV State University, and CARE co-chair, remarked : "We are doing our best to recreate the dynamic between young people and police in times that have been hard for everyone. We want young people who want to get involved in real ways to come to the forefront of this effort."

Kenyatta Grant with the WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence says of the trainings, "Enhancing relations with communities of color and law enforcement is

critical especially with what is happening in our country. Chief Webster's foresight and commitment to engaging his department in culturally specific trainings and dialogue is a testament on the importance of building strong relations within the community, increasing cultural awareness and establishing trust among residents in Charleston, West Virginia."

Rev. Ron English, with the RESET Initiative: "The CARE collaboration demonstrates productive engagement in building trust between clergy, police and the community to make constructive alliances for the safety and well-being of our city. The Charleston Black Ministerial Alliance has been proud to share partnership in this community building effort from its inception through the RESET mission and ministry."

Lida Shepherd with American Friends Service Committee notes that "By tracking the arrest rate, with particular attention to race and how the arrest was initiated, we can begin to better understand what accounts for the racial disparities in the CPD's arrests and also track the success of both the trainings and the incredible community engagement efforts of the Charleston Police Department."

###

Following the 30 minute press conference, there will be an opportunity for press to ask questions for 30 minutes. Additionally, members of the coalition are available for longer sit-down interviews in the days following the press conference.