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COMMUNITY GROUPS CALLS FOR PUBLIC FORUMS WITH POLICE CHIEF CANDIDATES

Denverites Must Have a Meaningful Role in Choosing New DPD Chief

DENVER — The Denver Justice Project (DJP) calls on Denver Mayor Michael Hancock and Executive Director of Safety Troy Riggs to open the process of hiring a new Chief for the Denver Police Department (DPD) to much more meaningful public participation. DJP and several other community organizations have launched a petition calling for the slate of finalists for Chief to appear at a public forum where they present their qualifications and their vision for policing in Denver, where members of the Denver community have an opportunity to ask question of and interact with the candidates, and where Denverites can indicate which candidate they believe best represents the interests of the people of Denver by participating in a straw poll, the results of which must be incorporated into the final decision on a new Chief.

DJP launched the petition calling for this change on Tuesday, June 12th and asks Denver residents to join us in supporting real public participation in the hiring process to ensure transparency and accountability in the selection of this important public official. The petition can be found at <http://bit.ly/DenverChiefForum>.

The people of Denver have a substantial say in choosing their mayor, members of city council, and occupants of many other public offices. The DPD Chief heads a public agency whose personnel are legally allowed to kill residents in the street and has much more impact on the lives of the residents than other public officials with selection processes are more participatory and transparent. Therefore, the people of Denver, especially people of color and low income families, must have a role in deciding who fills this critical position.

Yet with the announced retirement of Robert White, the current Chief, the Mayor and Director Riggs have adopted a deeply untransparent and seemingly rushed search process that, except for a committee handpicked by the administration with no public application process or apparent input from the community, will permit no meaningful role for the public in a final choice of White's replacement.

The city has held public forums "to solicit citizen input on qualities to look for in the next police chief," but being invited to contribute to a list of aspirational adjectives describing a hypothetical public official is no substitute for giving Denver residents the opportunity to assess the qualification of specific individual candidates or ask them about specific plans or stances before a final decision is made. In a show of these forums' inadequacy, some of the four gatherings had more police officers and safety department employees present than members of any other part of the community. Denver deserves better.

If one thing has become clear in relations between the people of Denver and DPD, it is that the people of Denver want and expect a higher level of transparency and accountability from the department than we have seen in the past. If the people of Denver are to believe that they can expect a new Chief to honor that expectation, that transparency and accountability must begin with the selection process and our community's ability to have a real say in its future.

When the city hired an Independent Monitor to oversee the Safety Department, it held public forums with candidates and gave the people of Denver the opportunity to assess those candidates and offer their opinions. It should do no less for a position as important and impactful as that of Police Chief – it should, in fact, do much more.

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The Denver Justice Project is a coalition effort created to empower communities impacted by oppression with the mission of transforming the nature of policing and the structure of the criminal justice system through intersectional movement building, direct action, policy advocacy, and collaborative education.