

February 1, 1973

MEMORANDUM TO: Police-Community Relations Committee

FROM: Field Division

SUBJECT: Common Council January 11, 1973 Hearing on Charges of  
Detroit Police Department Violations of Citizen Rights

In Late 1972 two incidents involving officers of the Police Department STRESS Unit resulted in the wounding of five police officers and the death of one officer. Subsequent to the first shooting incident, which followed officers' stopping a car to question the occupants, Mark Bethune, John Percy Boyd and Haywood Brown were publicly named by the Police Department as suspects. A fourth man, Ivan O. Williams, was arrested following the second shooting occurrence (which resulted in the death of one officer involved in a stake-out of a west side home) on a charge of harboring the three wanted men.

On January 12, 1973, Haywood Brown was captured by Detroit Police after a series of events which included the firebombing of a Planned Parenthood office and a pursuit from the Woodward and Parsons area to the Trumbull and Warren area where he was apprehended. Since that time the intensive manhunt for the two suspects, Bethune and Boyd, has continued.

Citizen complaints to the CCR and the Common Council and newspaper articles following the two shootings, charged the police with harassment of citizens, illegal arrests, illegal searches, flagrant display of firearms and physical abuse of citizens.

In response to the number of citizen abuse complaints received by the Common Council, they called a public hearing for the purpose of giving citizens an opportunity to freely express their grievances, and to obtain in this setting from Police Commissioner John F. Nichols an explanation of police actions alleged to be violations of their authority. The Council expressed hope that a reduction of community tensions would result and some problems would be more clearly identified, thereby increasing the chances for their effective resolution.

Initially the January 11th meeting had been scheduled to be held in the City-County Building Auditorium, but an overflow crowd of 900-1000 people forced a delay of the meeting and a shift of the site to the Ford Auditorium. This change of plan seemed to be added irritant to the people who already seemed impatient with the delay.

Originally, the Council agenda called for presentations in this order:

1. Complaints of police abuse known to the Council;
2. Complaints previously reported to agencies or organizations other than the Council;
3. Other complaints;
4. A response by the Police Commissioner
5. Comments (if time allowed) from spectators.

Nearly 30 people were able to state their complaints against the police, but the length of the meeting and the noise of the crowd prevented close adherence to the agenda.

The principal complainants were: Melba Boyd, sister of John Boyd  
John Clore, step-brother of Boyd  
Dorothy Clore, mother of Boyd (aunt of Brown)  
Sandra Overstreet, a friend of the family  
Zenobia Bramlee, aunt of Ivan Williams  
Simon Bramlee, cousin of Williams

These persons were the ones who had some direct ties to the named suspects in the shootings. They accused the police of numerous incidents of invasions of their homes, the open and threatening display of weapons, and the physical abuse and arrest of members of the family who were completely unconnected with the incident.

The reactions of the crowd to these charges became so noisy and tense that Nadine Brown of the Michigan Chronicle and Councilwoman Erma Henderson took the rostrum and appeared to be the only ones who could quiet the crowd.

When Commissioner Nichols was called on to respond to some of the complaints, the crowd became quite angry and noisy. After several attempts to read a prepared statement, the jeers and shouts from the audience forced him to withdraw before he was able to finish. (The proposed statement is attached.)

Attorney Kenneth Cockrell also made an appearance on stage carrying a large cardboard box. He attempted to present the box and its contents to the Council members. When his path on stage was obstructed by police officers he stated the box contained petitions with 30,000 signatures of people calling for the abolition of STRESS.

The balance of the program consisted of statements by some 25 more persons relating various incidents of police abuse and harassment (some of which appeared to be unrelated to the current manhunt). Since the Police Commissioner had left the auditorium after his first effort to speak had failed, he was not present to respond to these further charges.

In summing up, Councilman Carl Levin indicated that all complaints would be recorded and investigated. It was also indicated that some possible solutions to these problems were under consideration. These plans were neither revealed or explained at that time, and no further information has become available since then.

Since this meeting, there have been a number of activities in the community related to the public reactions to STRESS. The United Black Coalition, an organization of more than 25 black groups has met to find possible answers to this community problem.

In a press release on January 24, 1972, they called for a complete investigation of the present charges of police harassment and the suspension of STRESS and the denial of any further funding for such a program until the investigations are complete. The group has reportedly arranged for the FBI to conduct an investigation of the police actions.

The Commissioner has designated the Citizen Complaint section (CCS) of the Department to investigate the charges of police misconduct. CCS Inspector Alan Eichman refused to state how many men have been assigned to these investigations or how near to completion they are. He did say that CCS has received 27 complaints which are all being investigated. Reports on these investigations have not yet been submitted to the Commissioner, although some have been forwarded to the Commissioner's Advisory Panel. No conclusion has been reached as to the disposition of any of the complaints.

The Common Council had requested a report from the Commissioner on the investigation of the various complaints which had been received. The Commissioner is expected to submit that report on February 2, 1973 to the Common Council.