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COMMISSION ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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Assistant Director

June 18, 1969

*For information only
Was not mailed.*

Honorable Jerome P. Cavanagh, Mayor
City-County Building
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Dear Mayor Cavanagh:

The Subcommittee on Police-Community Relations of the Commission has been increasingly concerned about the lack of universal public trust in the Police Department. Our impression is that this situation is being aggravated by the lack of candor concerning the Citizen Complaint Bureau investigations into police actions.

The response of the Police Commissioner to allegations of police brutality at the New Bethel Church was that he was "not aware of any official complaints lodged with the Citizen Complaint Bureau in this matter." This response completely ignores the fact that the Bureau could have initiated an investigation into these widely discussed allegations. In addition, the CCR staff has a copy of a written complaint that was sent to the Police Commissioner by a person who was at the New Bethel Church and was arrested. Finally, many Detroiters believe the Department will not honestly investigate complaints against its own members. Actual instances of effective disciplinary actions are extremely difficult to find because they either do not occur or the Bureau moves slowly in investigating complaints or the Department will not release the information.

The Police-Community Relations Subcommittee has consistently and repeatedly sought to make this Bureau an effective agency for internal redress of grievances against Police.

In March of 1965 Commissioner Girardin agreed to a periodic CCR evaluation of the investigations made by CCB. The 1964 Annual Report of CCB cases was submitted in August of 1965. Since then, annual tabulations of CCB cases were

submitted to the CCR for the years 1965, 1966 and 1967.

On August 24, 1966 Commissioner Girardin consented to more regular evaluations of Bureau operations by CCR staff and pledged the cooperation of the Bureau in these efforts.

A On June 19, 1968, the Subcommittee made several recommendations to increase the effectiveness of CCB operations including "Mayoral appointment of a Citizens Liaison Panel to report monthly to the public on departmental activities."

On July 15, 1968, the Subcommittee noted that it was impossible to get information from CCB relating to the Poor People's March Incident and recommended a meeting with you and Commissioner Girardin.

A meeting was held with you on July 24, 1968. You disagreed with the contention that CCB was "an ineffective operation" but noted procedural interference by the D.P.O.A. You also noted that the Subcommittee was an excellent cross-section of the community and well suited to look into this problem. You noted newly appointed Commissioner Spreen's interest in setting a time limit on each CCB investigation and his interest in restructuring CCB.

On November 8, 1968, Commissioner Spreen asked for more time to review the Bureau's procedures and resolve conflicts between the Bureau, D.P.O.A. and the Civil Rights Commission. The Commissioner offered to supply case information from the Bureau but later emphasized he would authorize release of only case numbers, names and disposition.

On November 13 and again on December 13 Subcommittee Chairman Rev. Roy Allen directed letters to Commissioner Spreen asking for clarification of plans for CCB reorganization. The Commissioner answered on January 10, 1969: "I am presently studying staff composition, operations, procedures and other aspects of activities of Citizen Complaint Bureau to determine what improvements can be made." "I know that it is essential to proceed as rapidly as possible but I want to evaluate very carefully all of the reports, opinions and suggestions that I receive before making any changes. I can assure you that this is a high priority matter and that it is receiving my constant attention." The Commissioner's letter describes the establishment of a review panel for CCB activities designed to make recommendations to the Commissioner.

The Field Staff has been promised on two separate occasions in the last several months that the 1968 Annual Report of CCB cases would be forthcoming. This report is said to be on the Commissioner's desk.

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If the Police Department is to establish rapport and trust with the public, it must show some trust of the public. The actions of the police are the public's business. It is therefore imperative that the Annual Report of the CCB for 1968 be released immediately. The Police-Community Relations Subcommittee in requesting this report reasserts its intention to find a feasible basis for the restoration of universal public confidence in law enforcement.

Sincerely,

Rev. Roy Allen
Chairman