



## *CAPCR Shout Out*

### Civilian Oversight's Failed Meetings

By John Chasnoff

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While the Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression (CAPCR) is aware of the ongoing efforts of many of the Civilian Oversight Board's (COB) members and staff to fully realize the COB's potential, there are some things that just have to change right now. For starters, the COB's monthly public meetings have to fulfill some public purpose.

Public education and engagement has always been essential to the COB's work. Even before the COB's creation, CAPCR researched oversight models and instituted several years of public education which led to the establishment of a COB that would be strong enough to tackle the deeply rooted problems caused by lack of police transparency and abuses of power.

CAPCR members have attended almost all the public COB meetings since its beginning and has been encouraging others to do the same.

It is difficult to get people to come back a second time. For starters, publicly announced meetings need to start on time. Monday's public meeting was a mere 5 minutes long and started early. Anyone who arrived on time missed a substantial portion of the meeting.

It has been the policy of the COB to summarize complaints so that the public has some idea of the issues at hand. With the Executive Director absent from this last meeting, only case numbers were read. The public had no way of knowing the nature of the complaints or the meaning of the votes. This lack of public transparency is antithetical to the intent of the creation of the COB.

CAPCR understands that the closure of personnel records under Missouri law makes transparency difficult and that open meetings are necessarily lacking in detail. But last night's meeting made no effort to be as open as possible.

Even more importantly, there have been almost no efforts made to find other ways to make COB meetings meaningful to the public.

Despite requests, the COB is not using meetings to do public education, to discuss areas of policy they think need exploring, or to make known patterns of complaints they are seeing. They allow for public comment only sporadically.

The COB is also failing to use meetings to complete aspects of their training and professional development that are fundamental to the functions of this board.

Best practices for training COB members should include: 1) 'Know Your Rights' training by groups such as the ACLU, 2) history of biased policing by such groups as the NAACP, 3) the history of politicized responses to protest, 4) understanding the uses and limitations of racial profiling data...

When the COB first formed CAPCR gave members a list of such trainings and potential trainers, based largely on best practices as recommended by the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement. COB public meetings could involve presentations where they are receiving these trainings and the public has a reason to come and learn.

It is disrespectful to the community that COB members are willing to conduct meetings that are construed so narrowly and that do not embrace the community engagement and education aspects of their assigned mission.

CAPCR has always been acutely aware that the success of the COB would rely squarely on community engagement to hold the COB accountable for fulfilling its mission: review complaints, make pattern and policy recommendations, engage in training, and actively engage the public through outreach and public education events.

We urge the community to come to the COB meetings and demand something better. Those meetings are the third Monday of every month, 5:00 pm, 1520 Market Street, Rm 4029.