

Background Information on the Four Petition Demands

1. Open the monthly Sonoma County Law Enforcement Chiefs' Association meetings to the public under Brown Act type rules!

Every month, Sonoma County law enforcement chiefs - the District Attorney, the police chiefs, the Sheriff, the Probation chief, and more - get together to hammer out law enforcement issues and policies for the county. Astoundingly, they do so completely off the public record, behind closed doors. For a tangle of legal arguments, law enforcement is exempt from Brown Act open meeting requirements.

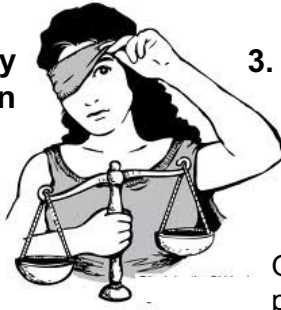
However, the key point here is that there is no law anywhere that prohibits the chiefs' meetings from obeying any or all of the Brown Act rules. All it would take would be a mandate from our local city councils and board of supervisors to put this in force.

It's unacceptable that in a democracy the debate and forging of our law enforcement policies is carried out in secret. With all the enormous behind-the-scenes powers already built into law enforcement activities, no community can afford to be so completely shut out of policy decisions. Creating transparency and community input on shaping law enforcement policy is key to reform. The monthly chiefs' meeting is a good place to start.

2. Establish county wide policy that all domestic violence and sex crime police reports get sent to the District Attorney's Office for review!

In stark contrast to official rhetoric, no category of serious crime is treated more poorly, and with such systematic and deliberate indifference, than sex crimes and domestic violence. In Sonoma County, according to the most recent compilation of 2011 statistics, over 75% of all sex crime reports and over 75% of all domestic violence calls for service get shelved and buried in our police departments without ever being sent to the DA for review. This discriminatory denial of justice by police is extremely dangerous to the community and must be stopped!

Setting policy that all domestic violence and sex crime reports be sent to the DA for review is not the entire solution, but it will serve to stem the mass burial of these cases that's currently taking place. There's no reason this policy can't be put into effect immediately. This exact policy was put in place county-wide in 1996 for domestic violence cases as a measure to combat police disregard. That policy has since been rescinded behind the closed doors of the law enforcement chiefs' meetings.



3. Form representative citizen groups - with veto power - to work with officials on the recruiting, hiring, training, and promotion of all law enforcement officers in our communities!

One of the most unexplored points of influence over police conduct is for the community to oversee who, and what kind of person, is allowed to wield police powers in the first place. There's no reason we can't have representative citizen committees, with veto power, involved at every point in the process, from recruiting, to hiring, training, promotions, and selection of chiefs.

A timely place to start is to form a representative citizen panel - with veto power - to join in the recruitment and hiring of Santa Rosa's upcoming selection of a new chief.

And another, and formidable area for change, is at our local police academy, where a rigid, outmoded system keeps replicating the same narrow brand of officers. The academy is rife with discriminatory and archaic practices, such as the academy's para-military style of training, a style that academies around the country are abandoning because of the 'us-them' mentality it instills.

4. The District Attorney's Office, as well as police and Sheriff's departments, should be included for review in any law enforcement Civilian Review Boards formed in Sonoma County!

Trying to reform police practices while ignoring the District Attorney's office is like trying to change the music coming from an orchestra without dealing with the conductor.

The DA is at the apex of law enforcement power. The DA's office reviews every crime report sent in from police agencies throughout the county, and decides which cases will be prosecuted and to which degree. In this role as ultimate gatekeeper and reviewer the district attorney has enormous control over police conduct.

Even though less visible than police, the DA not only has the power to single handedly determine which crime categories will be pursued or ignored, the office also has the power to tolerate or not tolerate abusive and discriminatory police practices in the community.

Including the district attorney's office in the purview of civilian review boards will greatly expand the breadth of community control of law enforcement practices.

What are we waiting for? Taking control of our law enforcement conduct is within our reach now, with or without formal civilian review boards!

