

Mayor Indya Kincannon
Room 691, City County Building
Knoxville, TN 3790

Dear Mayor Kincannon:

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee (ACLU-TN) and our supporters in Knoxville, we write to express our concerns about reports of law enforcement abuse in Knoxville as well as a culture of racism and sexism at Knoxville Police Department. We urge you and your administration to hear and heed calls from community members for meaningful change to the city's approach to policing. This work begins by ensuring community members have a central role in the process of selecting a new police chief.

Knoxville is at an inflection point. Community activists have been protesting for change at KPD for the past year, as revelations about KPD's treatment of Knoxvillians and internal culture have come to light. Less than a year ago, Knoxville Police Department officers shot and killed 17-year-old Anthony Thompson Jr. in a high school bathroom, sparking demonstrations for change across the city. Since then, reporters have uncovered an internal culture of systemic racism at KPD, as officers who made racist comments were protected by commanders on the force. Reports have also detailed a culture of sexism, as the deputy chief at KPD, Ron Green, was forced into retirement after multiple allegations of sexual misconduct dating as far back as 1998.

This month, Robert Bailey, a Black man, died in police custody after being pulled over for a broken taillight. Soon after, activist David Hayes was arrested on a KPD warrant at a meeting intended to be a safe space for community members to offer input on KPD's next police chief. (While we understand KPD did not execute the warrant, a KPD lieutenant tipped off KCSO to the existence of the warrant and his attendance at the meeting.¹) To many community members, Mr. Hayes' arrest and his assault by a KSCO deputy is an example of police brutality, political surveillance, and targeted intimidation meant to silence a community activist.

¹ **Knox County sheriff says Knoxville lieutenant set in motion arrest of activist David Hayes.**
<https://www.knoxnews.com/story/news/local/2022/01/10/knox-county-sheriff-says-knoxville-lieutenant-alerted-deputies-arrest-david-hayes/9151408002/>



PO Box 120160
Nashville TN 37212
(615) 320-7142
aclu-tn.org

The retirement of Chief Eve Thomas offers the city an opportunity to begin the rigorous work of transforming the culture at KPD and repairing relationships with community members. The new chief will be responsible for creating an internal culture that ensures KPD officers and staff treat all Knoxville residents with respect and dignity.

The first step toward realizing this culture would be to ensure that the Knoxville community is genuinely engaged in the police chief search. **ACLU-TN calls on you to create an open, inclusive, and community-led process for selecting its new police chief.**

We understand that the city has contracted with PERF to help conduct its search. While you have asked for public input through a series of community meetings, we believe that there is more you should do to include community members. We urge you to:

- **Seek out candidates with diverse backgrounds from across the country who have supported or implemented alternative, community-based solutions to public safety**
- **Ensure community members are a part of the process of interviewing candidates and selecting finalists for the position**
- **Publicly announce the finalists for the position**
- **Hold public interviews of finalists in which community members can submit or ask questions**

Beyond this personnel decision, the city's effort to improve its approach to policing should go much further. We support Knoxville councilmembers seeking to increase the transparency of police surveillance by giving the city council the power of approval over surveillance technology, and seeking to expand the resources, powers, and independence of its Police Advisory and Review Committee and improve internal culture at KPD. We believe the city should undertake both efforts and will vigorously support implementation of any measures to make policing safer and more humane in Knoxville.

We urge the mayor not just to listen, but to include community members, act on their demands, and make a commitment to alter Knoxville's approach to policing. We are ready to support community members however we can in their fight for a more just and fairer Knoxville.

Sincerely,



Hedy Weinberg
Executive Director

Brandon Tucker
Policy Director

