

GAY ACTIVISTS ALLIANCE OF WASHINGTON, DC, INC.  
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STATEMENT OF GAY ACTIVISTS ALLIANCE OF WASHINGTON, DC, INC., BEFORE  
THE DC POLICE CHIEF SELECTION COMMITTEE September 28, 1974

Members of the Panel:

My name is Craig Howell. I am Vice President of the Gay Activists Alliance of Washington, DC, Inc. (GAA/DC). With me this morning are Mr. Cade Ware, President-elect of GAA/DC, and Dr. Franklin E. Kameny, President of the Mattachine Society of Washington (MSW). We would like to extend our congratulations to this panel for taking the initiative in holding these hearings so that there can be some significant community input into the deliberations on the selection of our next DC police chief.

As we hope you will see before these hearings are concluded, the more than 50,000 gay citizens of this city have a vital interest in this selection process because of the disgraceful anti-gay behavior rampant within our Metropolitan Police Department. We are fed up with the police campaign of abuse, harrassment, and entrapment routinely waged against gay people, and we demand that our next DC police chief must be explicitly committed to ending these perverted police practices once and for all!

Because we have such a high stake in the selection of our next police chief, we are deeply disturbed by the absence of any openly gay women or men on this panel. Further, there was no effort made to consult with any portion of the gay community concerning possible appointees on your panel. If you wish to correct this glaring oversight and to demonstrate your good faith to the gay community, the Gay Activists Alliance formally requests you to retain as a consultant one of the country's foremost authorities on gay civil rights and civil liberties, Dr. Kameny. You should make him an integral part of all your deliberations, so that he can help you recognize the extent of the police abuses gay people are confronted with and so that he can help you recommend only those officers, gay or non-gay, who are sensitive to this situation and will work to correct it.

A full, or even adequate, description of the police oppression of gay citizens would require for more time than is available. Mr. Stewart has given you some ideas in that area. Police abuses are intolerable in a free society. The very name of the Vice Squad in this city--the Prostitution, Perversion and Obscenity Squad--is oppressive, not only to every gay person, but to every citizen who exercises the right to decide what is moral or immoral. How can the police department pretend they are committed to fighting the crime wave in Washington when they squander our tax money to indulge bigotry?

Our next DC police chief must be committed to halting the police warfare against gay citizens. Each candidate should be required to acknowledge that pervasive anti-gay prejudice is a serious problem within our Metropolitan Police Department and should be asked for concrete proposals to combat it. Among the specific actions which should be undertaken by our next chief would be the following:

(1) Formal appointment of a high-ranking police officer, acceptable to the gay community, to serve as official liaison between the police and the gay community. Just such a liaison has in fact been established by the San Francisco Police Department. This officer can help to build trust in the police within the gay community, which now regards the police as a foreign army of occupation.

(2) Our new police chief (not just a subordinate) should personally meet with representatives of the gay community soon after appointment, and should meet periodically with them or as needed thereafter. This would be in welcome contrast to the practice of the Present chief, Jerry Wilson, who has repeatedly ignored our requests for such a meeting over the past several years.

(3) Our new police chief should institute comprehensive training programs for all policemen and women, including those already on the force, to sensitize them to problems in relations between the police, gays, and other minority groups. Washington, DC, is rich in its diversity, and this diversity must be respected and appreciated by all police. A police badge must cease to be regarded as a hunting license. Those police who prefer prejudice to professionalism should be encouraged to seek employment elsewhere, preferably outside the District of Columbia.

(4) Our new police chief should immediately place a flat prohibition on the use of plainclothed police to enforce the laws on sodomy and solicitation for lewd and immoral purposes. One or two uniformed police will serve to meet all the requirements for the maintenance of public order in any such situation.

(5) The new police chief should immediately abolish the Prostitution, Perversion and Obscenity Squad, and, if necessary, rehabilitate those currently engaged in its sordid activities so that they can lead meaningful and even socially useful lives.

(6) Our new police chief should undertake an affirmative action plan to employ openly gay women and men throughout the Department. In view of the shamelessly anti-gay behavior and attitudes that have prevailed within our police force, such an effort must be extremely well-publicized and must be reinforced by actions such as we have recommended above. Title 34, DC Human Rights Law, requires non-discrimination in the employment practices of all DC government agencies. It is time that our Metropolitan Police Department commence

affirmative compliance with Title 34. Initially, current questions on application forms regarding personal sexual attitudes or practices should be summarily removed.

(7) Our new police chief should review and reform initial lock-up procedures and make the changes indicated by such review, e.g.: visits at any time to persons kept at the central lock-up.

We note with apprehension that this panel has been actively soliciting police officers from other cities to apply for the job of DC police chief. We are concerned because, while conditions are far from perfect here, they are appalling in most other large cities in this country. Homophobia--the pathological fear of homosexuals and homosexuality--is a sickness that has traditionally been endemic among police nationwide. Therefore, we strongly insist that you reject applicants who have anti-gay records. We offer our services to this panel to help you obtain information from other cities. In this context we would also remark that Chief Wilson has taken some steps to decrease police harassment of gay citizens. We certainly can not tolerate seeing the progress which has been made jeopardized by some anti-gay bigot such as Chief Davis of Los Angeles, or some other seedy character of his ilk.

When this panel makes its final recommendations for a new police chief, we urge you to add the following procedural proposals: First, that final to final selection, the Mayor hold open public hearings for eliciting testimony from the candidates themselves, and for questioning of them by the community, and second, that as soon as possible after the new Home Rule Charter goes into effect next January, the Mayor and City Council schedule full-scale hearings on police-community relations in general, on allocation of police resources, and on the general operation of our police department.

Today's hearings are a step in the right direction, but more concentrated efforts will be needed in order to make our Metropolitan Police Department one of which citizens of Washington, DC, can be proud.

Thank you.