

# Police Department Faces More Public Scrutiny | Hundreds in Community Demand 3rd-Party Investigation

*Formal complaints, public comments, and continued outcries push City and department to be more proactive in ongoing controversies and cases*

By **Eric Fabbro** - November 19, 2020



*FILE PHOTO: Eric Fabbro | SouthPasadenan.com News | A crowd of protesters marches to City Hall with London Lang and Fahren James after a rally at Garfield Park in August*

'Defund the police.'

The phrase has become increasingly ubiquitous in the City of South Pasadena, gaining traction as citizens, watchdogs, and social justice advocates have inferred law enforcement actions — for the better half of this year — as revealing a thinly-veiled bias against Black Lives Matter supporters, activists, protesters, women, children, and people of color.

A group of several hundred citizens and counting have continued to publicly scrutinize the South Pasadena Police Department and the City due to its apparent lack of professionalism and immediate action in relation to a series of incidents in which protesters were assaulted and largely disregarded by responding and investigating officers.

Confluently described as a "repeated pattern of bias and inaccuracies", many have called for a thorough and formal investigation into allegations of bias present in the city's Police Department.

Though numerous public outcries by way of avenues such as marches, rallies, and letters to the city seemed thoroughly exhausted and perceptibly unheeded, the battle was brought to

the SPPD's doorstep this past Sunday, when a group handed in their formal citizen complaints against several members of the department.

Officer Christina Roppo, Corporal Gilberto Carillo, and Corporal Randy Wise have been criticized as exhibiting unprofessional or biased behavior by victims and witnesses directly involved in the ongoing investigations generated by the assaults that occurred over the last several months — most prominently the cases involving Joe Luis Richcreek, Richard Cheney, and the hi-profile assault of a 16-year old minor by pro-Trump supporters during the controversial Nov 1 rally.

Instances of local demonstrators being seemingly disfavored have been corroborated by first and second-hand reports from the previously mentioned conflicts.

This also has not been the first case of Wise being the subject of denunciation for alleged misconduct. The July 11 citizen's arrest of Richcreek was mired by Wise's overtly defensive behavior, displaying a self-beleaguered attitude, as he called the witnesses on the scene a "mob" and felt that he was threatened by a distressed crowd. Video footage of the confrontation that evening, however, appears to contradict Wise's accusations. Those filming the events, post-altercation, are evidently a safe distance away from the officers, they do not address the officers in an inflammatory or derogatory manner, nor is the frustration wholly directed at Wise and his cohorts, rather the focal point of reprimanding is Richcreek.

This did not stop Wise from labeling the BLM protesters as "anti-police", an inaccurate term that time-and-time-again, BLM Organizers Fahren James and London Lang have taken issue with.

While advocacy groups like the Care First South Pasadena, South Pasadena Youth for Police Reform (SPY4R), the Anti-Racism Committee (ARC), and South Pasadena Tenants Union (SPTU) have coalesced and supported the local BLM chapter, their goals — though mostly aligned — have been misconstrued as patently anti-police. A cursory look into these groups' stated demands does not indicate blatant calls for the dissolution of the department, more its reformation and the ensuing re-allocation of city budget to more socially-driven services.

A formally drafted public comment with 146 signatories "to express deep concern for the pattern of behavior that has been observed of the South Pasadena Police Department", was submitted to City Council on Wednesday "in response to intolerant, violent, and egregious acts toward community members advocating for Black lives and other causes that question our city government's relationships with citizens belonging to marginalized communities". The comment magnifies and supplements previous demands made by Care First, who organized a petition with over 500 signatures to date, requesting an investigation following Police Chief Joe Ortiz's controversial (and ultimately retracted) decision to host an extreme conservative religious group for a prayer event; the American Society for Defense of Tradition, Family and Property is labeled as virulently anti-LGBTQ+ and a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center and has been vocal opponents of the BLM movement.

City Council listened to dozens of recorded messages assimilating in a chorus of recriminations against a department that "refused to protect Black Lives Matter South

Pasadena protesters” said Minerva Garcia, a friend of Vanessa Marquez, the actress shot and killed by SPPD Officers in 2018. Garcia’s stance was more unforgiving than others, saying that “city’s charter be rescinded” and to “have the entire city council be fired along with police. There’s too much corruption in the city government, not one of you can be trusted to do the right thing by your constituents. They have suggested an independent governmental agency be called in to investigate the SPPD, I however don’t believe anything short of abolishing the police will do. The South Pasadena City Council does nothing to hold South Pasadena Police Department accountable.”

“There are assaults involving individuals who are doing nothing more than exercising their first amendment rights to bring important matters to the public’s attention,” proclaimed Jim DeSimone, a civil rights attorney who has worked with Fahren James on several cases. “We think that this independent review will be beneficial because it will show some of the implicit racism that Ms. James and others have been exhibited [and] have been subjected to by members of the police department.”

Mother Veronica Carrizales called the inactions of the department a “failure to act and perform your duty to protect the residents of South Pasadena.”

Councilmember Michael Cacciotti, deeply affected by some of the night’s comments rebutted with “I’m concerned about when it said the city council, or individual city council members aren’t doing anything. I just want to make it clear that whenever I’ve been given a concern by a resident or a constituent that I immediately — whether it’s after midnight, which I’ve done on multiple occasions — with multiple residents, contact them when I’m falling asleep by email, by phone call, by personal meeting.” He went on to say “it’d be a misrepresentation to say we’re not doing anything.”

Councilmember Steve Rossi added with his response, “I’ve been I’ve known Fahren, London and a number of the individuals that have been out there protesting with BLM for for a while... I guess I’ve been anxiously awaiting some resolution as well,” ultimately hitting pause on his thoughts until City Manager, Sean Joyce’s communications.

Later in the evening Joyce addressed the slew of complaints with “Pursuant to state law, we investigate every formal written citizen complaint of our police department and its members. Accordingly, upon receipt of several such written complaints that I received Monday evening, I met the following day with the city’s Human Resources manager, city attorney and an experienced independent outside investigator that I have retained to immediately begin objective investigations of each of those complaints.”

Joyce continued, saying, “I hope that everyone will understand that no further comment can be made pending the outcome of those independent investigations. I am certainly available to council members along the way but from my part, I will keep my own appropriate distance from those investigations to ensure that they are in the independence” while assuring all parties involved that he has “great confidence in the investigator.” He concluded, “I would ask for folks to know that council members are engaged several have represented that that receiving it is it is the case they aren’t shy about asking me anything about anything, or ever asking for status reports on things. With respect to investigations, we all know that there’s a point at which we know to withdraw and keep a distance so that

the investigations occur unencumbered by our own bias or the perception of the same. We are taking all of the complaints seriously.”

---

---

**Eric Fabbro**

*<http://nexusplex.com>*

Eric Fabbro is a South Pasadenan whose family goes back to the 1950's. He graduated SPHS 2008, and Art Center College of Design in 2014. His versatile skill-set includes illustration, digital media, graphic design & photography. Eric is the in-house illustrator for The South Pasadenan, and the creator of our South Pasadenan icon logo. His work has been shown in galleries throughout the Los Angeles area.

