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Residents, officers seek more diversity in law enforcement

Meet in Boston to urge fairness

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 02, 2012

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On a recent radio broadcast, a group of female officers from the Boston Police Department shared personal accounts about a familiar issue that has plagued law enforcement for years: racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination.

They were surprised by the show of support in the community.

“People were outraged and disgusted,” said Larry Ellison, president of the Massachusetts Association of Minority Law Enforcement Officers, which arranged the radio broadcast in early March.

“A lot of the issues they thought were no longer present in 2012 are still alive and well,” he said.

On Sunday night, more than 75 Boston residents gathered at the Global Ministries Church in Dorchester to hear and discuss the issue directly with a panel of active and retired Boston Police Department officers, Transit Police, and State Police troopers.

Some of the 10 officers and troopers were racial and ethnic minorities.

The event, also organized by the association Ellison heads, was simulcast online and on WCRA, an AM radio station.

The officers on the panel were from departments that have been under criticism, including some lawsuits, that contend minority officers are treated unfairly.

The female officers shared stories about unequal treatment they and their colleagues have faced, from disciplinary matters, to recruitment, hiring, promotions, and retention.

“There are small battles every day,” said Boston police Sergeant Pamela Besold, who said she is one of 10 female patrol sergeants in a department that has about 300 male patrol sergeants.

Cornell Mills, a Roxbury resident who runs Blackstonian, a website for issues facing the black community, said residents have tried repeatedly in recent months to meet with leaders of Boston police and of the Suffolk County district attorney’s office to discuss discrimination.

He said the idea was ultimately rejected by those officials.

“They should be the ones up on stage answering these questions,” Mills said.

Gladys Gaines, a former Boston police deputy superintendent who recently retired after 24 years on the force, called on the community to continue to demand greater diversity in the local police forces.

“We will bang, we will kick the doors in if need be, but we do need you,” she said. “We want you to step to the plate, not for us, but for yourselves.”

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