

# The Black Voter Outreach Network of PA

## Request for Transparency and Accountability: Lancaster City, PA Police De-escalation Practices and Use of Force Review

Submitted for Public Record – Lancaster City Council Meeting | Tuesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

To: Lancaster City Council

### Executive Summary:

The Black Voter Outreach Network of PA is calling for immediate transparency and accountability following the **March 2nd incident** involving **Lancaster City Police and several Latino teens**, marking the **third recent case** of questionable force against minority residents. **Police Chief Richard Mendez**, a 25-year veteran and Lancaster native, must answer for the ongoing pattern of force used against Black and Latino community members. We are asking for **City Council to pass a resolution mandating an independent investigation**, public release of past and present **Use of Force Reports**, and **the creation of a Public Safety Commission** to provide proper oversight. Lancaster's policing practices must be held to a higher standard, and the **City Council must take action to ensure true accountability, not just empty statements**. Join us at the **March 9th City Council meeting** to demand justice and transparency.

### Introduction

The recent incident involving Lancaster City Police officers and **teens** on **March 2, 2025**, is the latest in a pattern of disturbing interactions between law enforcement and marginalized communities in Lancaster. The video evidence clearly depicts excessive force being used against the youth despite them following police commands. The failure to de-escalate and the immediate use of physical force directly contradict the de-escalation policies outlined by the Lancaster City Police Department.

This incident is **not isolated**. In recent months, there have been multiple high-profile cases where Black residents of the city were met by officers who used questionable force, raising urgent questions about Lancaster police practices and accountability.

We recognize that **City Councilors Ahmed Ahmed and John Hursh** have publicly called for transparency and accountability in response to these incidents. However, public statements alone are not enough. **We call on City Council to take formal action by passing a resolution that**



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**mandates an independent review of this incident and guarantees public disclosure of the findings.**

At the center of this issue is **Police Chief Richard Mendez**. A **lifelong Lancaster resident, a graduate of the School District of Lancaster, and a 25-year veteran of the police department**, Chief Mendez knows this community and its struggles. As the first Hispanic Police Chief in Lancaster's history, he should understand firsthand the challenges marginalized communities face when interacting with law enforcement. **Yet, under his leadership, the use of force incidents involving Black and Latino residents have continued.**

Chief Mendez, we ask you directly: **What are you doing to ensure that these incidents stop? How are you holding your officers accountable?** The community deserves answers. A chief who understands Lancaster's needs should work toward solutions, not allowing the status quo of over-policing and excessive force to continue.

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## Physical Use of Force Data (Q4 2024 Report)

According to the **Lancaster City Police Department's Q4 2024 Use of Force Report**, there were:

- **39 total use-of-force incidents.**
- **7 incidents involving force used against minors.**
- **14 incidents where force was used against Latino residents.**
- **8 incidents where force was used against Black residents.**
- **23 incidents involving takedowns or physical strikes.**
- **9 incidents involving the use of chemical agents (mace/pepper spray).**
- **4 incidents involving tasers.**

These numbers highlight an urgent problem. **Latino and Black residents are disproportionately affected by use-of-force incidents.** The lack of detailed public reports beyond Q4 2024 means the community cannot track trends, patterns, or systemic issues.

Chief Mendez, as the leader of this department, these numbers fall under your command. We demand an explanation for why minority residents continue to experience disproportionate force at the hands of your officers.



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## Call for Action: A City Council Resolution

We are requesting **Lancaster City Council** to formally introduce and pass a resolution that calls for:

### **An Immediate and Transparent Review of the March 2nd Incident**

- The investigation must be conducted independently (by independent we mean citizen participation outside of the police department) with findings made publicly available.
- The review must address whether Lancaster City Police officers followed their de-escalation policies before resorting to force.
- After the review, we request a follow-up from the city answering the below questions:

#### **1. Public Disclosure of Past and Current Use of Force Reports**

- Currently, **only Q4 2024** use-of-force data is available on the city's website. Why?
- We request **all past Use of Force Reports** be made public to allow for analysis of long-term trends and patterns.
- Future reports must be published quarterly in an accessible and detailed format.

#### **2. Clarification and Expansion of the City Council's Public Safety Oversight**

- **Does Lancaster City have a formal Public Safety Commission?** If so, what is its role in handling incidents of excessive force?
- If no such commission exists, we urge **the creation of an independent Public Safety Commission** tasked with reviewing and monitoring police conduct.
- **How does the Public Safety Committee currently work with the police department?** What oversight powers does it hold? How does it differ from other city oversight boards (e.g., Ethics Commission, Civil Service Board, Housing Authority)?

#### **3. An Official Presentation of the Q1 2025 Use of Force Report at a Public Meeting**

- The **Q4 2024 report showed 39 use-of-force incidents**. Q1 is not over, but we want to know what those numbers for Q1 2025 are in a timely manner.
- City Council must ensure that police data is transparent and regularly presented at meetings.



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## 4. Reinstatement of a Civilian Review Board

- At one point, Lancaster City had a **Civilian Review Board**. It now appears to be abandoned. **Why was it disbanded?**
  - We request that the **City Council explore reinstating** a civilian oversight body that allows community members to participate in reviewing and addressing police misconduct.
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## Why This Matters

The **lack of a dedicated Public Safety Commission, the absence of historical use-of-force data, and the failure to ensure meaningful civilian oversight** all point to a systemic failure in police accountability. If the City Council does not take action, it sends a clear message that Lancaster's governing body is unwilling to prioritize the safety of its residents and, in this particular instance, the rights of its Black and Brown residents.

This is **not just about one incident**. It concerns whether Lancaster City will uphold its commitment to transparency and fair policing. The **actions taken today will define the future of public trust in our city's leadership**.

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## Conclusion & Next Steps

The Black Voter Outreach Network of PA will continue to advocate for meaningful reforms and transparency within Lancaster City's government. **We expect a response to our requests at the upcoming City Council meeting on Tuesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025.**

We also ask that **Council Members Diaz, Ahmed, and Hursh** provide updates on their actions to improve oversight of the police department, as they are currently on The public safety committee.

**Chief Mendez**, as the leader of Lancaster's law enforcement, we expect you to engage with this community in good faith and be **accountable to the residents you serve**.

We appreciate your time and attention to this matter and look forward to seeing meaningful steps toward accountability and justice.



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**Respectfully,**

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Founder, The Black Voter Outreach Network of PA



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