

LVN: Police & Fire Commission Project Report

Local Voices Network & Police and Fire Commission

The following are a series of emergent themes from both the collection of Police and Fire Commission conversations, and the larger Madison corpus of Local Voices Network (LVN) conversations. With each emergent theme, we offer questions informed by the snippets within that theme. By no means is this a full representation of all the ideas and themes that arose around law enforcement within LVN conversations. However, we prioritize observations, stories, personal experiences, and suggestions from those we found to be most directly impacted by the police. With that said, we pull a total of **57 snippets**, from **48 unique people**, across **31 conversations** for this report. Conversations and the snippets included in this report include wide representation from the community in terms of age, race, ethnicity, gender, language, disability status, and socio-economic status.

Due to the richness of conversations, we have also tagged many more relevant snippets within a google sheet, including the conversation link, snippet text, type of content (story, solution, observation), and topic. We have also marked "priority" snippets for those who have been directly affected by policing. There are 130 snippets across 53 conversations. [Please feel free to explore the full sheet here.](#) For the list of conversations completed specifically for the Police and Fire Commission, please follow [this link](#).

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**Each of these sections include possible interview questions responding to community hopes and concerns*

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Power, Trust, and Fear

Power

SUMMARY: Consistently across conversations, participants tell stories of [misuse of power and corruption](#), [unnecessary force even against families](#), and [coercion against the most vulnerable](#). Many also acknowledge the police as human beings, but humans [emboldened by and empowered with guns](#). What happens when they have a bad day, or they aren't nice guys? [Norma wonders if](#) "they are getting the support that they need and that kind of training to deal in under stress situations," for a stressed person with a gun is dangerous. Others highlight moments when the [police used their powers to push back against racism within the police force](#), and those involved in the police force [highlight the racism within, and how they hope to create change from within](#).

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: Can you tell a story of a moment in your time as a police officer when you've witnessed a misuse of power? How did you respond?

What is your perspective on armed police officers? How do you protect the citizens against the bad actors when they have so much power?

Specific snippets mentioned in the Power summary:

[John](#) tells a story from his experience with law enforcement in Madison. South police chief using racism against John within his own police force as a teaching tool.

[Carmella](#) talks about an incident with Denise Marcum. Tells a story of harassment and no documentation at a probation check-in.

[Carmella](#) tells the story of the police coming to her house after neighbors filed a noise complaint about her 13 and 14 year old kids jumping on the trampoline at 8 o'clock in the evening. Her kids were handcuffed.

[A story](#) describing Black youth getting followed by the police for no reason. "What kind of training does one officer have versus the other?"

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[Police officer Eric](#) describes experiencing racism within the police force.

[Norma](#) tells a story about a police officer who she was friendly with threatening her friend. "Are they getting the support that they need and that kind of training to deal in under stress situations?"

[Carla](#) talks about accountability after seeing change move at a glacial pace if at all with the independent auditor position. "So it's just in terms of how do you repair, how do you heal? How do you really change as an institution here in Madison?"

[Carla](#) observes how police can be emboldened with a gun. "It's hard to get away from how powerful the institution and the badge and having a gun is, and how much that emboldens individuals to treat people like crap if they want to... I don't know how you train people to be nice, to be good people when they just have a bad day."

[Shirley](#) tells a story of experiencing racism at a restaurant, getting the police called on her, and being falsely accused.

[Linda](#) remembering the last police chief calling Tony Robinson's grandmother a lunatic and other names rather than hearing her concerns and speaking with her, then acting out. ""What? So, here's the chief of police, with a gun threatening...that's part of why I wanted to be part of this conversation is because it is so important who our chief is. Because, that person sets a tone for the entire department. "

[Mark](#) describes his experience watching reports of police brutality on tv. "I go 'what kind of training did these guys go through? Were they sleeping?' Because, that's not good police work. That's terrible police work, and the public shouldn't have to put up with that."

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Trust

SUMMARY: Many directly impacted people expressed learning [as a child](#) and [through life experience](#) to [never trust the police](#). Some explain that the police are [reactive rather than proactive](#), contributing to this mistrust, others identify [moments when the police failed to intervene](#), blamed the victim, or [failed to protect because of racial biases in moments of conflict](#). Participants that do describe having positive relationships with police officers and work with them regularly highlight that if a police officer is on duty that they do not know, they won't call when in need, [for they can't take the risk of trusting an officer they do not know](#).

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTION: What do you see as best practices to build trust with traditionally marginalized members of the community who have been given many reasons to distrust police?

Specific snippets mentioned in the Trust summary:

[James](#) describes being taught to never trust the police in any situation as a child, and tells stories of why he continues to distrust them today.

[Ananda](#) explains that the police do not mean safety. "When did police solve my problem of safety, ever ... in 41 years of my life."

[Linda](#) has strong relationships with officers she works with on South Park Street. But, if an officer she knows isn't in, she won't call for fear of brutality against those she works with. "We just won't risk it."

[Norma](#) describes police as being more reactive than proactive. Offers the idea of creating a crisis response team that comes when there is a crisis at home or anywhere before the police.

[Mou](#) talks about encountering racism for the first time, here in Madison when someone called her a "gook" on State Street. Police told her to leave.

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[Baltazar](#) tells of his white neighbor who is committing major crimes but being let off the hook. “I dare to say that if this person was an immigrant, if this person was of color, if this person was poor or not connected with so much money, I think that this person would be in jail right now, if not dead.” [Originally in Spanish, translation in endnote 1].

[Paulo](#) notes that there are going to be trade-offs when we make policy changes that are necessary to improve our community.

[Cecilia](#) tells the story of her and her husband having to be their own investigators when their son gets wrongly accused: “In one of the trials they even took a policeman, asking him about the case, and the policeman was not even the one who arrested him, they did not even know each other.” [Originally in Spanish, translation in endnote 2]

Fear

SUMMARY: Participants, particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), described feeling fear at the thought of police. Some participants felt [dread at the idea of getting pulled over](#). Some [feared the consequences that might come from demonstrating and participating in activism](#), while others felt less so afraid of the police, and [more so afraid of their neighbors profiling them and calling the police](#). A participant named feeling safer in the south, for Black people were judges and in policy and could advocate for other BIPOC, but [in Madison she feels vulnerable](#). Others, after engaging with police and having positive experiences, hoped to find ways to reduce fear and rather [highlight police as a potential resource for the Latinx community](#). Overlapping greatly with Trust and Power, fear of police was a common and clear theme throughout the conversations.

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: From these conversations, it seems that police fear some of the communities they work in, and the communities fear the police in return. What fears have you observed in the communities you’ve policed in? What fears have you felt yourself have while policing? What strategies might you deploy to help heal harms that cause these fears?

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Specific snippets mentioned in the Fear summary:

[Mike](#) describes being less afraid of the police, and more-so afraid of people calling the police on him or getting racially profiled.

[Jennifer](#) describes feeling less safe in Madison than in the South because of the racism within the justice system.

[Alex](#) describes wanting to demonstrate and engage in activism in Madison, but feared consequences such as jeopardizing family housing.

[Rodrigo](#) explains that people of color in Madison feel nervous and are singled out by security guards and local police.

[Baltazar](#) describes feeling dread about getting pulled over. "I feel bad when I see an entire army of cops who are just guarding the Beltline. As if there were killers on the Beltline." [Originally in Spanish, translation in endnote 3]

[Baltazar](#) tells a detailed story of being profiled and handcuffed: "I still remember seeing the hole in the gun." [Originally in Spanish, translation in endnote 4]

[Mathias](#) explains: I also want to encourage my Latinx community to be like, "[Police] are resources for you. They're here to help you rather than being scared that they can't call the police when something comes up for various reasons."

Police and Youth

SUMMARY: In our conversations, key themes emerged around [police in schools intimidating young people](#), backfiring against their intended purpose. Participants named that the [school system doesn't support all of its youth](#), and [those it doesn't support are funnelled into the criminal justice system](#). [Disparities exist between Black and white students in schools](#) in terms of punishment and violence

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enacted on students, and participants tell stories of [violence against students](#) by administrators, [violence by police](#), and [harm to families caused by the criminal justice system](#). Others highlight that when the [school doesn't know what to do, they call the police](#) rather than doing the work and learning how to engage. Further, [little tolerance is shown for teenagers](#), they are [often de-humanized](#), and [disempowered](#). For some, it feels as if the police sitting in or outside of schools are just [waiting for the students to have a vulnerable moment](#).

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: What is your personal perspective on law enforcement's engagement with youth, and what strategies do you support regarding police in schools? How can we ensure an environment in which youth are able to learn and thrive, free from fear?

Specific snippets mentioned in the Police and Youth summary:

[Amparo](#) tells the story of a young Black girl getting pushed by a principal and her hair pulled. No accountability was shown. Amparo asks: "What does that tell this young little girl? That her experience is not valid? That she is now a victim and nobody believes you? You have no voice. There is no justice for you?"

[Kadjata](#) describes why people of color distrust the police and why having them in schools is harmful, "The police have never been on our side. Ever. Ever, ever, ever."

[Hanna](#) describes the lack of humanity and respect Black and Brown students feel when police are in schools. "There is no reason why police should be in schools. And the only reason they are is because the MMSD school district is failing. It is failing our Black and Brown students."

[Jackie](#) tells the story of her niece at East Highschool. The police threatened her in an attempt to get her to flip and tell on a classmate suspected of a crime though Jackie's niece had no connection to the incident.

[Dorothy](#) remembering a time when her foster son was kneeled on by the police after having an outburst at school. "I'm raising a white son and this was a black boy. And I

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know many of my son's friends act out and are angry and they've been suspended from school. But they never had the cops called in."

[Shanita](#)'s biggest fear is the safety of her children. She feels great pride for her kids, for as young Black men vocal in today's protests, she believes they are doing it right. But fears the threats they receive.

[Nancy](#) notices the disparity between white and Black young men experiencing policing by observing her own boys' interaction compared to the stories of others.

[Monica](#) describes the harm the criminal justice system done to her and her family. Talks about finding healing from her community.

[Monica](#) tells a childhood story where she was harassed by kids, a fight emerged, and the police came to her door, angry. Describes the tired feeling of having the same cop pull her over again and again.

[Robin](#) names that putting police in schools is backfiring and harmful: "these offices being there could in fact make the need for a police presence stronger because these kids feel intimidated." Describes how quickly the school brings police in when they don't know what to do, rather than learning how to support.

[Dustin](#) sees that the school isn't serving all the students, and the ones it doesn't serve or support go into the juvenile justice system.

[Mike's](#) soul breaks to realize the things youth who are stealing cars are living through, and the ways others don't see them as humans.

[Kate](#) explains police have little tolerance for teenagers.

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Scope and Knowledge of Police

Scope of Policing, Redistribution of Resources

SUMMARY: Participants consistently advocated for a redistribution of resources and a reduced scope of policing to not include [overdose calls](#), responding to those struggling with [mental illness](#), policing homelessness, and beyond. Others praise [those that go the extra mile](#) and become trained in social work, for if they have to fill the role of a social worker, they must be fully trained as one. Participants advocate for reducing funding for police and removing them from schools, and [distributing those resources instead to proven-effective supports like counselors](#).

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTION: What is your perspective on the scope of policing and the breadth of responsibilities police carry?

Specific snippets mentioned in the Scope of Policing, Redistribution of Resources summary:

[Paul](#) suggests that those arrested for drugs should be treated, not in jail.

[Felix](#) disagrees with police in schools because it takes money away from schools and devotes it to people who are not counselors.

[Norma](#) talks about a police officer going to school to learn social work.

[Eric](#), a police officer, describing the wide extended role of the police.

[Daryl](#) tells the story of Tony Robinson's death. Perhaps police shouldn't have been first responders.

[Janie](#) from Just Dane, talks about the scope of policing and how important partnerships and being proactive are.

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Compassion and Bias

SUMMARY: Within the LVN conversations, no directly impacted people advocated for more policing or heavier police presence in their communities. But participants did suggest that if police were to be present in their communities, they should be *from* that community, for right now those who are not often don't respond with compassion. Participants describe [bias within police from outside communities](#), and how [police feel threatened and lash out](#) because of these biases. Others highlighted their [strategies within their own community to protect youth from experiencing harm from these biases](#) and [reduce the likelihood of a lash-out](#). Others describe the [power of compassion](#) in moments of pain and struggle rather than force and violence, and [how not feeling threatened but showing care saves lives](#).

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: What is your commitment to addressing and reducing bias in your police force? Please share an example from your own experience of the way bias shows up for police and at least one successful method you have utilized to counteract that bias individually and institutionally.

Specific snippets mentioned in the Compassion and Bias summary:

[Carla](#) names that combining community policing with the role of the police is dangerous, for it is easy to conflate safety and comfort.

[Aron](#) tells a story of having a temper tantrum, and being met with compassion rather than force. "And I say that because to this day that was an act of love. And it was not an act of disrespect... and so I think when it comes from the family and from the community, it's a better perspective versus it coming from the police because police gonna do just that. They gonna police."

[Aron](#) explains "you're not so quick to want to lock everybody up or you're not so quick to pull your gun and shoot someone" when you're from that community

[Shanita](#) remembers a time when she knew the police in her community, and they did *not* respond with fear, but cared. How can we reduce fear and increase care and compassion?

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[Carmella](#) talks about the importance of officers getting to know the community, and how she enabled this community engagement through a bake sale.

[Verge](#) would love to see a better relationship between law enforcement and the community. Wonders, how do we help that relationship heal?

[Brian](#) wonders, might community informed policing help prevent further people from dying because of snap decisions made by law enforcement?

[Kimberly](#) hopes the police force can be “Something that works for everyone and not just for the few that hold the most power. Something that treats people with dignity.”

Engagement with and Understanding of Black, Indegenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)

SUMMARY: Those participating in the conversations highlighted how essential it is for the next chief to [understand and respectfully engage with the Latino and African American communities](#). Others explained it is [important to have Latino and Black people in positions of power](#), for allies have not always stood for BIPOC best interests. Further, it is essential that all police know [federal and local laws as they evolve, and where their jurisdiction ends](#) and how different communities in particular are affected by different laws, such as in immigration policy. To better learn, participants did not advocate for more police in the community, but rather advocated for [those in power to create space for those most affected at the table](#) or a [the head of the table](#) of decision making and policy

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: What is your understanding of systemic racism? How will you center the people who are most impacted by racial disparities in the criminal justice system in creating systemic change?

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Specific snippets mentioned in the Engagement with and Understanding of BIPOC summary:

[Baltazar](#) describes Madison as tired of having allies. She doesn't want more people who claim to "understand" or want to "save" minority communities, but instead BIPOC in positions of power, as the police chief, who will respond to the needs of these communities. [Originally in Spanish, translation in end 5]

[Ananda](#) tells her story of experiencing the police raiding her apartment. Even with the social capital gained from running for office, she still was profiled. Part I

[Ananda](#) tells her story of experiencing the police raiding her apartment. Even with the social capital gained from running for office, she still was profiled. Part II

[Rosie, Isabel, and Margarita](#) all ask that the new police chief be compassionate, and learn from, understand, and respectfully engage with the Latino community and African American community. [Originally in Spanish, translation in footnote 6]

[Carla](#) asks for police to learn about the laws locally and federally, and see where their scope ends. Wishes police would understand immigration is a huge topic in this country, and it isn't their job to solve it.

[Jerome](#), "those who are closest to the problems are closest to the solutions, especially in the criminal justice system." Those most affected need to be at the table for real, meaningful change.

[Sedgwick](#) names BIPOC in power as a key for real change.

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Disability, Mental Health, and Police

SUMMARY: Policing those with disabilities, be they physical, mental, or emotional, emerged as painful and dangerous for those with disabilities. A conversation with deaf participants highlighted that [handcuffing a deaf person is like gagging them](#), taking their ability to communicate away. Further, police rarely have any knowledge on how to engage with disabled people, and disempower them by only [communicating with abled people](#). Others feel [fear at the idea of loved ones with autism being confronted by police](#), for they understand differently and do not follow directions. Will that frighten the police? Will they get so scared they lash out? [Finally, others tell stories of loved ones struggling with mental illness being met with violence](#) rather than support by the police.

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: What do you see as the role of police in responding to mental health or drug-related crises? How do you ensure safety and inclusion for people with disabilities and people actively struggling with mental illness and/or addiction?

Specific snippets mentioned in the Disability, Mental Health, and Police summary:

[Kimberly](#) tells the story of her brother in law who passed this year, who was not offered support when struggling with his mental health but criminalized.

[John](#) describes the importance of community-officer connection, and officers trained to respond to calls dealing with issues of mental health.

[JP, Anna, and Kyle](#) describe being deaf and being arrested by or interacting with police. Explains that handcuffing a deaf person takes away all communication.

[Robin](#) struggles to give guidance on how to interact with the police, and reflects about her autistic son who can't follow orders the way others might.

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In Conclusion: Messages for the PFC

Within these conversations, some participants spoke directly to the Police and Fire Commission or the new police chief emphasizing what they need, want they want to see, and potential solutions for issues raised. [Carla](#) craves someone who will change the status quo. [Paul](#) emphasized the importance of rescoping the police responsibilities to not include handling overdoses, mental health issues, and beyond to both simplify the task of policing and protect citizens. Remembering the previous police chief's aggression and outbursts after the murder of Tony Robinson, [Linda](#) named that the cheif "sets a tone for the entire department," and if that tone is threatening, the department will be threatening. Many people, like [Bob](#), suggested an increased emphasis on training, building on the prior work of MPD. As a current officer, [Howard](#) reflected on the necessary tension of competing priorities when hiring a new chief. As someone who engages with the police regularly through work, [Mark](#) emphasized needing a police agency that listens to citizens, and gets rid of violent, unsuitable actors in their police force. [Jerome](#) described a truly successful police force as one that invites those who are most impacted, those directly impacted by the criminal justice system, to the table. And finally, [Robin](#) explains why she says Black Lives Matter: "It just means that there is a drastic change on how things are handled with black or brown people and Caucasian people, so right now, we need the attention on us, because we're getting gunned down at a high rate. And we're getting locked up at an even higher rate for petty crimes and for no crimes at all."

Lastly, we will update this report with a brief medley of conversation snippets from each of the major thematic areas in advance of your next meeting. This will give a general sense of what we heard within the conversations. Our hope is that it may be utilized in the interview process as a way to include community voice.

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Endnotes

1 - "One of the things that also worries me is that, I think, depending on the color of the skin or the connections that one has - a person has less chance. Where I live, we have a neighbor, he is a neighbor who seems to have money, this neighbor is tall and white. This neighbor has caused fear where we live, to the level of having about ten policemen there with weapons pointing at him; the neighbor has not been able to be put in jail, the neighbor has not been able to be convicted. I want to dare to say that if this person were an immigrant or if this person were of a different color, or that they did not have so much money, that they were not connected with so much money, I think that this person would already be in jail right now and if not, dead. That's a rage that gives me, that still-- the police still excuse themselves: "Oh, because--", I don't know what, and we've been asking why nothing has happened, "oh, call us when so and so!" [laughs]. And me well, what if he kills me when he gets rough. So, I do not know, it is something that yes, it does concern me and I want to dare to say that if that person were of a different color they would already be cast in prison, based on the experiences we have had out there. So-- yeah, thank you."

2 - "A few years ago unfortunately I had a very bad experience with one of my sons, that he was arrested. He was with some friends downtown, he was about 18 years old, so they just grabbed him, took him into custody. They were blaming him for-- some girl I think had spoken up and said that he had bothered her or something. So all the data she gave in court was completely different from what he was wearing. In one of the trials they even took a policeman, asking him about the case, and the policeman was not even the one who arrested him, they did not even know each other. In other words, they just grabbed any policeman for him to answer. So they did determine in the end - well, obviously, after they did research, do research and all that, thank God my son was released. He was not the person they were looking for. Later on the news they sent us a message that it was the wrong person and that they apologized for that. But what I mean is that in one of the trials they were asking the policeman that it was not even the one who had arrested him, and he answered as if he knew about the case, as if he knew about it, when it was not even like that. So, my husband and I began to look for evidence, we began to be our own lawyers to be able to defend our son, saying places and times where he was, how he was dressed and everything, and learn to defend oneself, because if we didn't do it that way, my son might have been detained for much longer. So we - my husband most of all, he moved here and there and started looking for hard evidence that my son was not the person they were looking for. And when we gave them the evidence, they saw it, and they determined that yes, indeed he was innocent of the charge he was being blamed for."

3 - "One of the things that worries me is what Isabel said. Precisely, it happened last week, where I still have the dread that I had when I didn't have a license, that every time I see - if there were like ten patrol cars there, to see who they were going to catch. Yes, I am very concerned about the community, especially that fear that may exist. That is not protecting our community, that is raiding our community. Why do you need ten patrols that are controlling traffic? Something that worries me is that relationship between the police and traffic control. That we know that in other

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countries traffic control is done by another government entity and it is something that does concern me, especially with our community, the fact that we have these laws and I don't know, I feel bad when I see an entire army of cops who are just guarding the Beltline. As if there were killers on the Beltline; the only thing that maybe someone can do is, go a little faster than the other person. So, yes to me-- I feel that this is an abuse, it is an abuse and also a silly use of resources. So many police just for the Beltline."

4 - "One afternoon I was going to a gym there, from a park in Milwaukee; I was wearing a yellow jacket, my first jacket from here, from the Wisconsin winter, and I went to the gym, and there were some policemen who were looking for someone, I went out and at that moment I saw how this policeman told me: "Hold up", and He pointed a gun at me. I still remember seeing the hole in the gun as well, and it's good that I didn't follow; They handcuffed me, put me behind the car, in the police car. At that time I did not know English, at that time I was undocumented and I thought they were taking me because maybe they had discovered that I was working with a fake social security. So, I remember when I was in the-- what's his name? In the patrol, in the back of the patrol. Me, with fear, with dread and saying: "Wow, maybe it's because they realized it. Now, here, here it was." Then they took me through a neighborhood and asked this lady if - what I could understand at that time, it was 2000; If I was the person who had done something to her son, and the lady said: "No, no, no." From what I could understand, as well as what it looks like. At that moment, the policemen changed their attitude, very ashamed"

5 - "I think Madison is tired of having allies. We have many people who have worked, who want to work with communities, with minorities, and who may be white, and who say: "Well, I did not experience this but I understand why because I am an ally", "Yes, I am not an immigrant, but I can understand you because I am an ally ", " as a white person I want to help you and I want to save you ". I feel like it would help a lot if this person who is the chief of police is a person of color, that he is a person who understands. And it is something that we are demanding, that it be a person who understands, who has that knowledge of our communities, not just someone who is open, but someone who knows how to do the job. I think we are already tired of having people who work in the city who, they like the Latino community, they are open to Latino community, they are open to the black community. We want leaders who respond to the needs of our communities; And they have to do it, they have to put, hire people who know what the undocumented community is, the African-American community, the immigrant community, the LGTB + community. That they don't have to sit down for us to explain. This is something that we demand, it is something that today's Madison needs so that we can move forward."

6 - "Rosie

That the police, that the new organization, or the new police be more compassionate, that they really treat the Latino community as they treat the white community. That we are treated as people, as I already said.

Mathias

Thank you very much, Rossie.

Isabel

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Well, the new policeman, for me, would have to be someone who was involved in the Latino community, so that they could learn our customs, who would learn the values of our people, so maybe there would be a little more tact to be able to understand ourselves as a Latino community.

Mathias

Margarita?

Margarita

Yes. Well, as I said before, we do not ask them be to the same as us, or to speak the language that we speak, to speak Spanish, but it is necessary and essential that they consider that our community needs a person, a leader who knows how to understand our community, who knows how to understand the minorities that live here, because we are part of the community and we are part of those who work here, that also our community and the businesses that are here benefit from us, because we live here. So, it is necessary and essential that this new person knows how to understand our community, knows how to understand minorities, the Latino community and African Americans too, especially and in particular."