

# Police, citizens call for better communications

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**BENTON TOWNSHIP** — Law enforcement officers and residents want the same thing – better communication – according to the participants of a police-community relations forum held Wednesday at Lake Michigan College.

“Communication is the key” to better police-citizen interactions, stated Niles Police Chief James Millin, one of about 35 participants in the event held by the Governor’s Office of Urban Initiatives and the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards. “It all starts with communication.”

The session was the first of several to be held around the state under a mandate from Gov. Rick Snyder to MCOLES to gather comments from residents in person and online. Those comments will be included in a report due in May, that

will be used by the agency that monitors police training.

The effort will have an impact on the training provided to Michigan’s 18,500 law enforcement officers, according to David Harvey, executive director of MCOLES.

Velicia Humes, an organizational consultant, led the meeting, which included group discussions on what steps can be taken to increase trust between cops and citizens. Humes said that after every interaction between residents and police, all parties should be able to walk away and say “I like them and they like me.”

Participants also should ask “Are they willing to help me?” and “Can I trust them?” Humes said.

Participants suggested that more community policing, block watches and regular contact between residents and police could create an atmosphere of



John Matuszak / HP Staff

**Residents participate Wednesday in the police-community relations forum sponsored by the Michigan Coalition on Law Enforcement Standards at Lake Michigan College. Comments from events around the state, and an online survey, will be included in a report to Gov. Rick Snyder that will generate recommendations for improving interactions between police and citizens.**

respect.

One group suggested community appreciation events for officers “who are putting their lives on the line every day.” Participants said such activities would help residents see police as “regular people.”

Cultural diversity train-

ing was suggested, as well as more diversity in police ranks with women, minorities and different ages.

Other attendees spoke of the need for residents to have a safe place where they could bring their complaints of possible police misconduct to a neutral in-

dividual who could investigate such allegations. Some said good cops need the same opportunity to weed out bad cops.

“The saddest part is not the brutality or the misconduct by the bad cops, but the appalling silence of the good ones,” one participant offered.

After the discussion, Millin said police need to speak to residents in a respectful manner, and residents need to do the same toward officers. “If we can do that, we’ve accomplished the biggest part.”

He said dialogues such as these are worthwhile. “We learn from each other. Even when it’s negative, it’s positive.”

Millin added that if additional training is mandated following the final report, there needs to be funding for departments to send their officers to these sessions.

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# COMMUNICATE

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Ashley Spratling attended as a member of the Delta

Sigma Theta sorority, which she said has a mission of community service. She said he biggest eye-opener for her was learning that police and residents have the same

desire to improve relations. Humes said that the conversations and report will not be the final step, and that it is up to a vigilant citizenrv to make sure that the

recommendations are put in place.

“You expect what you inspect,” Humes said.

To take the online MCOLES survev. visit

www.surveymonkey.com/r/ExeDir2016-2. The deadline for submitting comments is March 20.

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