



The start of a new year always begins with the promise of a fresh start. This year our fresh start begins with a new interim Police Chief, as the city goes on a national search for a permanent chief. I expect this new chief to improve underperforming expectations of outgoing Chief Durham.

Back in 2015 when he(Alfred Durham) became Police Chief, the [shooting of Michael Brown helped change hearts and minds](#) ( [nationally regarding the way that Black communities are being policed](#) )about the way policing occurs. But it has been almost five years since Michael Brown's death and police killings have continued to draw controversy even here in Richmond. A Black male teacher who was loved among his students was shot to death by the people whose job it is to serve and protect. He was [known to be](#) "one the most caring and selfless people you'd ever meet." Marcus David Peters

was unarmed, clearly in distress, and needed help, not death. “Being unarmed and Black or Brown can not be a death sentence. Being unarmed and going through a mental health crisis can not be a death sentence.” said Princess Blanding, the sister of Marcus David Peters in an interview with [Black Feminist Collective](#). “We will continue to fight for Justice and Reformation while stressing the fact that unarmed people who are going through a confirmed or potential mental health crisis, need [#HelpNotDeath](#).”

I hope that the next RPD chief can come to terms with the law enforcement’s racist history with racism and the brutalization of the Black community and of people with mental illnesses. The next RPD chief should also address the [56 murders](#) in our small city, and the alarmingly high amount of Black folks who lost their lives to violence. It would be prudent of them to count people killed by police in the number of murder victims reported. The murder of Marcus-David Peters was ruled "a justifiable homicide". My expectations for the new RPD chief is to hold the police for abusing Black and Brown folks. Police shouldn't walk away free of charges after brutalizing the most vulnerable groups of people.

My final expectation for My final expectation for Chief Smith and other people who are interested in being the next RPD Chief is to take the [“One Mind” pledge](#) and join with the local community members and mental health organizations to make points of mental health crisis and police intersections safe. As a Black person trained in conflict resolution to reduce gun violence in Central Virginia, it’s important to me that the police are trained in conflict resolution, as well as de-escalation and how they address mental health. "It is important to know how to deal with these individuals and the resources that are available to provide a person going through a mental health situation with the proper supports and resources," says Princess Blanding. If the police would get the training they need to interact with marginalized communities, we would have safer police encounters.

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