



PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION

Public Safety Commission Meeting - 5/28/2026

Date: May 28, 2026

Location: Willie L. Hinton Neighborhood Resource Center

Time: 6:05 PM

Quorum: Yes

I. Roll Call

- **Members Present:**

- Commissioner Burris
- Commissioner Herts
- Commissioner Gilbert
- Commissioner Doyle
- Commissioner Summers (new appointee)
- Commissioner Graves (new appointee)

- **Members Absent:**

- Commissioner Charles
- Commissioner Fowler

- A quorum was confirmed.

II. Opening Comments

A. Two newly appointed commissioners introduced themselves:

- Commissioner Kendall Summers — born and raised in Little Rock; pastor at Greater Pleasant Grove (referenced as "Great Prairie" in the recording); expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve and help make a positive impact in the city.
- Commissioner Solomon Gray — lifelong Little Rock resident, grew up near Willis Harbor Park; career background in the Department of Corrections; currently leads local government accounts for Comcast. Noted this as a

"full circle" experience, having attended his first commission meeting at this same venue years prior.

B. Departure of Mayor's Office Liaison

- A commission liaison from the Mayor's Office announced that this meeting was his final session with the commission, as he is relocating to Houston/Harris County to accept a new role. He reflected on five and a half years in Little Rock, including time at Philander Smith College, work on a gubernatorial campaign, and approximately two years supporting the Mayor's Office and this commission (previously known as the HOPE Advisory Council before its formal establishment as the Public Safety Commission). He thanked the commission for the opportunity to serve and offered to remain available by phone. Commissioner Herts noted the liaison's history with the predecessor HOPE Advisory Council and praised his accomplishments, including completing a master's degree at Cornell University during his tenure.

C. Retirement of Chief Helton

- Chief Helton announced that this meeting was also his final appearance before the commission, as he is retiring after nearly 30 years of service with the Little Rock Police Department, including three and a half years as Chief. He cited personal reflection, family considerations (including caring for his mother), and a sense that it was simply time to begin a new chapter. He emphasized that the decision was unrelated to compensation, dissatisfaction, or lack of support. He stated he intends to remain active in the community and is considering future work with youth.

II. Old Business

A. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

- A motion was made and seconded to adopt the minutes from the previous meeting.
- Vote: All present voted in favor (Aye). Motion carried.

B. Bylaw Amendment — Attendance Provision (Withdrawal)

- The City Attorney's representative reported that the commission's previously approved bylaw amendment (removing the three-consecutive-absences trigger and retaining only the 25%-per-year

standard) had been presented to the City Board of Directors. The Board expressed concern that approving a change for this commission alone could create pressure for all 19 boards and commissions citywide to seek similar changes, given that most use comparable language. The Board's preference was for any revised attendance language to apply citywide, not solely to the Public Safety Commission.

- After discussion, the commission agreed that pursuing a citywide rewrite was outside its purview and that the existing language, while redundant, does not functionally disadvantage the commission. The commission noted that a more appropriate citywide approach might also distinguish between monthly- and quarterly-meeting bodies, since a single missed meeting for a quarterly body is proportionally more severe than for a monthly body.
- Motion: A motion was made to withdraw the commission's request to amend its attendance bylaw. Seconded.
- Vote: All present voted in favor (Aye). Motion carried.

C. Crime Statistics and Department Update (Chief Helton)

Chief Helton provided the following updates in his final report to the commission:

- Overall violent crime is down approximately 5% year-to-date; overall crime is down approximately 1%, with property crime increases attributed in part to broader economic conditions.
- The department recorded its ninth homicide of the year the previous day; an arrest was made within approximately 24 hours, aided by the Real-Time Crime Center. The department maintains a 100% homicide clearance rate, consistent with the prior year.
- By comparison, the department had recorded 35 homicides at the same point the previous year — a substantial year-over-year decrease.
- Staffing remains the department's most significant challenge, with 67 current vacancies. Several additional departures (retirements and an FBI recruitment of two officers) are anticipated in the coming months.
- Eight School Resource Officers (SROs) are assigned to summer school sites; the remaining eight SROs are being reassigned to the River Market area on weekends to engage with juveniles.
- The juvenile curfew implemented the previous year has had a continued deterrent effect, with only four total curfew violations reported.
- Midnight Basketball is expanding from one night per week to two nights this summer.

B. Leadership Transition

- Chief Helton confirmed that Assistant Chief Michael Miller will serve as the first interim chief, with each of the department's three assistant chiefs expected to rotate through the interim role (an initial 60-day period, potentially extending to 90 days) while the city conducts its search for a permanent chief. All three assistant chiefs have 25 or more years of service with the department.

C. Recruiting and Internship Opportunities

Chief Helton described the department's Police Cadet Program (ages 18-21), which offers paid employment, hands-on exposure to department operations, and a direct pathway to recruit school. Sworn-position internships face CJIS restrictions, but non-sworn internships exist in the social work program and Real-Time Crime Center. He also stressed the need for better public storytelling, noting media and social media skew heavily toward negative incidents.

D. Vacant and Unsafe Structures — Correlation with Crime

Chief Helton confirmed a strong link between abandoned structures and crime — citing narcotics activity, prostitution, homeless encampments, fire risk, and past incidents of assault and weapons concealment. Housing and Neighborhood Programs faces staffing constraints, so he encouraged neighborhood associations to report such properties promptly.

E. Faith-Based Community Partnerships

A commissioner suggested leveraging clergy and community networks (e.g., the Divine Nine) to promote recruiting and safety programs to parents and graduating students. Chief Helton was supportive, noting the department already partners with community groups on request and sees faith-based outreach as valuable for recruiting.

F. Recruiting and Compensation

Applicant interest has dropped sharply (375 test-takers historically vs. ~30 today), mirroring trends at the fire department. Starting pay is roughly \$57,000 with no degree required, plus a \$10,000 graduation bonus and \$5,000 residency incentive — about \$70,000 in year one, making LRPD the highest-paid department in central Arkansas (state police pay more but lack step increases). He also cited demographic gains: ~26% female officers (toward a 30% goal under IACP 30x30) and growth in Hispanic representation (from ~2 to nearly 60 officers), plus specialized language skills including Mandarin.

G. Citizen Perception Survey — Discussion

A commissioner proposed a citywide survey on public safety perceptions, noting views likely vary by area. Commissioner Charles had previously floated a school/youth-focused version that was never circulated. The commission agreed to develop this further, possibly via subcommittee, and discussed using the Mayor's newsletter to boost response rates.

III. New Business

A. City Attorney's Office Update

- The Chief Deputy City Attorney welcomed new commissioners and provided guidance on:
- Arkansas Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) compliance — commissioners were reminded that all commission communications, including email threads, are subject to public records and open meetings laws. Sequential "reply-all" email discussions among commissioners can inadvertently constitute an unlawful public meeting.
- Response timelines — FOIA requests must generally be answered within three business days, or within an extended period (e.g., 14 days) if the request is voluminous.
- Recommended practice of discussing sensitive topics by phone or in person rather than in writing, given that all written communications are subject to disclosure.
- Awareness that, particularly approaching election season, commissioners' personal social media activity may draw public scrutiny.
- Designation of Rachel Breitweiser as interim staff liaison/logistical support for the commission and its subcommittees.
- Distribution of a basic Robert's Rules of Order reference document to commissioners.

B. MEMS MIH-CP Letter — Board Follow-Up

- The commission received an update on its previously submitted letter of support for the MEMS Mobile Integrated Health Community Paramedicine (MIH-CP) program. One City Board member raised a concern that prioritizing high utilizers of 911/EMS services could result in elderly residents' calls being deprioritized or perceived as less urgent. City

Manager's office staff arranged for MEMS leadership to speak directly with that Board member; the conversation did not resolve the concern. MEMS is now expected to present directly to the full Board to address the matter. The commission asked to be informed of the timing of that Board presentation.

B. Commission Scope and Board Engagement

- The departing Mayor's Office liaison encouraged the commission to continue taking an active, proactive role and to keep pushing for greater Board of Directors engagement. It was noted that the commission has lacked a formally designated Board liaison for some time; while one Board member previously expressed willingness to serve in this capacity, no one has formally taken on the role. The commission was reminded that Board members — not the Mayor — select which commissions they liaise with, and that the city's Boards and Commissions webpage lists current liaison assignments by commission.

C. Subcommittee — Citizen Survey Planning

- The commission agreed to convene its subcommittee (noted participants: Commissioner Burris and Commissioner Fowler, with other commissioners welcome to join) to begin developing the citizen perception survey concept for refinement and a future return to the full commission. A commissioner who has served on the commission for an extended period cautioned new commissioners not to expect rapid implementation of new ideas, noting that city government processes take time.

IV. Citizen Communications

- There were none.

VI. Adjournment

- Commissioner Doyle made the motion to adjourn at 7:05 pm. Commissioner Burris seconded.
- All votes in favor. The meeting was adjourned.