

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC DEFENDER

MANOHAR RAJU – PUBLIC DEFENDER
MATT GONZALEZ – CHIEF ATTORNEY



May 4, 2020

Dear Mayor Breed, Members of the Board of Supervisors and Police Commissioners,

I am writing to request that the Police Commission resume meeting this month and to support the suggestion by Commissioner Hamasaki that the first such Commission meeting occur on May 13, 2020.

I believe that it is critical for the Commission to resume its regular meetings because of the special role it plays in holding SFPD publicly accountable and implementing much needed reforms. This is all the more true in the wake of another police shooting^{1,2} and controversy surrounding masks that many community-members found offensive and tone-deaf.

Authorization has been given for other commissions such as the Historic Preservation Commission and the Recreation and Park Commission's Capital Committee to meet, both scheduled this week, yet permission has yet to be granted for the Police Commission meetings to resume.

The Police Commission held its last public meeting on February 19, some 75 days ago. It is time that the Mayor or the Board of Supervisors grant the Police Commission permission to resume meeting.

Though COVID-19 no doubt poses unique challenges to normal government functions, police commissions across the state have begun to hold virtual meetings or have begun the process to hold virtual meetings. On April 9 and then again on April 23, the Oakland Police Commission held a virtual public meeting that included agenda items held in closed session. The public was not only able to watch the proceedings but was also able to make public comments via zoom or phone call.

And our City, in many cases, has done an excellent job of leveraging technology to give the public access to critical government functions: the Board of Supervisors has held remote meetings since March 30.³ San Francisco Superior Courts have also leveraged technology to allow lawyers and witnesses to appear remotely. And our courts are not alone: the nation's

¹ See <https://www.sfexaminer.com/news/sfpd-releases-videos-of-tenderloin-police-shooting/>.

² See <https://www.ktvu.com/news/carjacking-suspect-stabs-off-duty-sfpd-officer-steals-patrol-car-before-being-killed-by-police>.

³ See <https://sfbos.org/events/calendar/past?page=1>.

Adult Division - HOJ
555 Seventh Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
P: 415.553.1671
F: 415.553.9810
www.sfpdpublicdefender.org

Juvenile Division - YGC
375 Woodside Avenue, Rm. 118
San Francisco, CA 94127
P: 415.753.7601
F: 415.566.3030

Juvenile Division - JJC
258A Laguna Honda Blvd.
San Francisco, CA 94116
P: 415.753.8174
F: 415.753.8175

Clean Slate
P: 415.553.9337
www.sfpdpublicdefender.org/services

Community Justice Center
P: 415.202.2832
F: 415.563.8506

Bayview Magic
P: 415.558.2428
www.bayviewmagic.org

MoMagic
P: 415.567.0400
www.momagic.org

top court will hear argument today via phone and give the public live access, something it has traditionally been loath to do.⁴

Regular Police Commission meetings provide an unmatched layer of transparency and public accountability, especially following disturbing events around police action. And the Commission's routine functions are also crucial to community-police relations, including meting out police discipline where appropriate, considering policy changes, updating the public on SFPD's and DPA's compliance with S.B. 1421, and enhancing policies to prohibit biased policing and discrimination within SFPD. Indeed, not long before the shelter-in-place order, the Commission called for a probe into allegations by implicit bias trainer Dante King that SFPD has an "anti-black bias."⁵ The "blue lives matter" masks suggests that probe has been on hold long enough.

Having the Police Commission recommence their meetings next week will bring some normalcy during these fraught times and will message to the community that San Francisco takes police oversight and reform seriously. The public deserves the accountability the Commission provides to resume.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Manohar Raju". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Manohar Raju
Public Defender

⁴ See https://www.npr.org/2020/05/03/848317039/listen-live-supreme-court-arguments-begin-monday?utm_campaign=politics&utm_medium=social&utm_term=nprnews&utm_source=twitter.com

⁵ See <https://www.sfexaminer.com/news/police-commission-president-calls-for-probe-into-allegations-of-rampant-anti-black-bias-in-sfpd/>.