



## NACOLE Candidate Election Questionnaire

Name: Tonya McClary

Position Sought: At-Large Member

Geographic Location: Philadelphia, PA

Current Employment: Executive Director of the Citizens Police Oversight Commission (CPOC)

1. How long have you been involved with NACOLE, and how did you initially become involved?

I have been involved with NACOLE since 2017, when I began working at the Office of the Independent Police Monitor (IPM) in New Orleans, LA, as the office's first Chief Monitor for use of force. The New Orleans office has always had a strong connection to NACOLE, so the organization played a significant role in my training and work as I started my career in police oversight.

Since then, I have attended nearly every NACOLE annual conference, as well as several regional ones.

2. Which NACOLE Committees have you served on?

I began my volunteer journey with NACOLE shortly after joining the IPM, and since then, I have been dedicated to the Member Development and Support Committee. This committee plays a pivotal role in fulfilling NACOLE's mission. Throughout my tenure, I have contributed to numerous initiatives aimed at empowering our members. For instance, I actively participated in the Peer-to-Peer Support initiative, which was particularly meaningful to me as a newcomer to oversight. I recognized the importance of ensuring that my peers felt confident and supported in their roles. This committee has not only paired individuals together for support but also paired organizations together to help with the development of new offices and to help troubleshoot this ever-changing terrain of civilian oversight.

Additionally, our committee has consistently worked to create a welcoming environment for new members, facilitating their integration into the NACOLE network through engaging gatherings at annual conferences. These efforts not only strengthen our community but also enhance our collective impact in the field.

Have you had other involvement in NACOLE as a volunteer?

I am a part of the mediation working group.

In 2022, I was on the planning committee for the NACOLE Annual Conference that was held in Fort Worth, Texas. During that time, I was the Police Monitor and Executive Director for the Office of Community Police Oversight (OCPO) in Dallas, TX. It was amazing to work with the NACOLE staff and the other civilian oversight leaders in Texas to host the conference.

### 3. Please share highlights of your background/experience in law enforcement oversight.

#### **Background**

Before joining the field of civilian police oversight, I had an extensive career working on issues that touched policing very directly as a public defender and advocate for human rights.

In the human rights field, my work in policing encompassed working with groups at all levels of government to develop strategies to offset brutality in communities, document human rights abuses, and work with police agencies on the development of community policing standards. I also assisted some of these same groups in addressing issues internationally to independent monitoring bodies, like the United Nations. I developed partnerships with national police organizations (such as the National Black Police Association and 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care), which carried the understanding and support of the police, to review responses to police brutality and inadequate responses from internal affairs departments. Working with groups like these was important to understanding police culture and ensuring that there was interest and cooperation from police departments when recommendations were being put forward.

I have also served as a criminal defense litigator and public defender for almost two decades. My public defense work has been in three very different jurisdictions: Baltimore City, MD, New Orleans, LA, and Dallas, TX. My private case (pro bono) work has been in Alabama and Mississippi. Doing this work, I have been able to see firsthand the impact of good and bad policing on the criminal justice system. In fact, I was the Circuit Court Chief at the Maryland Office of the Public Defender in Baltimore, MD when Freddie Gray, Jr. was killed in the back of a transport van by Baltimore City police officers. Our office represented many of the protestors.

My experience as a criminal defense litigator has allowed me to spend considerable time in jails and prisons, which will be valuable in working with NACOLE members who oversee these facilities. I have witnessed the detrimental effects of poor practices within jails and prisons and have advocated for numerous clients regarding their conditions. Additionally, I have investigated misconduct in jails, including deaths that occur in custody. As part of my human rights work, I collaborated with members of the United Nations to develop a universal prison bill of rights.

#### **Police Oversight Work**

I started doing civilian police oversight work as the Chief Monitor at the Office of the Independent Police Monitor (OIPM) in New Orleans in 2017. In that capacity, I built and directed the Use of Force Department. As the Chief Monitor, I directly monitored all critical incidents and uses of force by the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) and their subsequent investigations. I also handled oversight of disciplinary hearings and complaints that involved use of force, made training and tactical recommendations at monthly Use of Force Review Board

meetings, and created public reports for each critical incident with the findings from our monitoring. Because use of force cases often garners public attention, I frequently served as a spokesperson for the OIPM on local and national media outlets.

In addition to my use of force work, I also served on the office's management team alongside the Police Monitor and Deputy Monitor to manage all office operations and strategic planning and represented the office at high level meetings with NOPD, City officials, the Consent Decree Monitors, and national police oversight partners. I also supervised the attorneys and volunteers who worked in my department, and I also supervised the New Orleans Community-Police Mediation Program. Because of my passion for community outreach and advocacy, I also took on the role of recruiting and supervising a Public Allies Fellow who will primarily be working with a group called Families Overcoming Injustice (FOI). This group is made up of loved ones who have had a family member killed by the NOPD. FOI started meeting many years ago as a support group for one another. However, over time they learned that they shared many of the same concerns about the investigation of their loved ones' cases. The group moved from being solely a support mechanism to making policy changes within the NOPD in the form of "*A Family Bill of Rights*".

In 2020 I had the pleasure of becoming the first Police Monitor for the city of Dallas, Texas and the first Director of the Office of Community Police Oversight (OCPO). In that capacity, I oversaw the Dallas Police Department (DPD), which is the eighth largest police department in the county. As the first Police Monitor and Director for OCPO, it was my job to build the office from the ground up. That meant hiring all the staff, writing all the policies for both OCPO and how to work with DPD and engaging the Dallas community. I also staffed and directed the Community Police Oversight Board (CPOB) which has 15 members who are appointed by City Council members and the Mayor.

I started in my role in late February of 2020 and two weeks later the City of Dallas and the rest of the country/world was in a pandemic. Starting an office from the ground up is hard enough, but you can imagine how hard it is to build an office during a pandemic. Especially when a large part of the success of the office is having the civilians in Dallas know that the office exists and developing trust in the community through community outreach and engagement. However, despite all of that the OCPO and CPOB have been very successful in their work. A large part of that is the vision and foundation I have laid for both the office and the Board.

With my leadership in the office, we have managed to get some major policy changes within DPD. One of the significant ones is a 72-hour video release policy for officer-involved shootings, deaths in custody and other critical incidents. The Community of Dallas has been fighting for this policy for 40-plus years. Not only did I get the policy enacted in the DPD's General Orders, I also wrote a significant part of the policy. I also made the policy retroactive so that families that have had a loved one killed prior to the policy taking effect in June of 2020 can also now see the footage and hopefully get closer to closure in their lives. My office also hosts for DPD the showing of all video footage to the families of the deceased person who was killed by DPD. This policy ensures that a neutral party is always in the room to answer questions that DPD may not be able to answer for several reasons and gives the family of the loved one someone that is not affiliated with the police department as a contact during such an emotional time.

The office also reviewed all DPD's protest and use of force policies in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. In the City of Dallas, we had 100-plus days of protest and several of the interactions between civilians and members of DPD were not ideal and some of them were violent. It was in this context that OCPO reviewed all the policies and made several recommendations to DPD that the department has and is implementing.

In 2024, I had the honor of becoming the first permanent Executive Director of the Citizens Police Oversight Commission. In this pivotal role, I serve as the chief executive and operating officer, driving the implementation of our Commission's strategic plans and policies. This experience has been immensely rewarding, yet it presents unique challenges and unpredictability. One of the most significant hurdles has been navigating the powerful influence of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP). Confronting this challenge has not only tested my abilities but has also enriched my skill set, further empowering me in my mission to ensure effective civilian oversight.

Empowering communities through accountability and transparency in law enforcement is not just a mission; it's a responsibility we owe to every civilian in Philadelphia. As the new executive director of the Citizens Police Oversight Commission, I am committed to fostering trust, promoting justice, and ensuring that our police serve and protect with integrity and respect for all.

#### 4. Why do you want to serve on NACOLE's Board?

I have a passion for social justice and a strong desire to promote that, along with accountability and civil rights, with law enforcement, which contributes to a fairer and more equitable society.

I want to enhance oversight, and I believe NACOLE plays a crucial role in that effort. Since I began my work in oversight in 2017 and became familiar with NACOLE, the organization has consistently served as a valuable resource for me regarding issues affecting this field. When I receive inquiries from community leaders, city officials, and others interested in establishing an oversight agency, I always recommend that they connect with NACOLE.

I also want to help leave a lasting impact on law enforcement practices, contributing to a legacy of accountability and community trust for future generations.

#### What makes NACOLE's mission important to you?

I have had a unique experience in this field, serving as the "first" in each of my roles. Building a division focused on the use of force from scratch in New Orleans, establishing an entire office during the pandemic in Dallas, and advancing my current office in Philadelphia have all provided me with insights into the numerous challenges and opportunities in this work.

The mission of NACOLE, which aims to create a supportive community, has been invaluable to me in my day-to-day efforts. Additionally, I share the goal of helping practitioners make their

local law enforcement agencies, jails, and prisons more transparent, accountable, and responsive to the communities they serve.

5. What skills/qualities do you expect to contribute as a Board member?

I have spent many years on nonprofit boards ranging in size from organizations with less than 5 staff to multi-million dollar international organizations with 100+ staff.

Some of the skills I would bring to NACOLE are:

- **Advocacy skills**---experience in advocating for civil rights, community concerns, and accountability and law enforcement, effectively communicating the needs of diverse populations.
- **Legal knowledge**---understanding the legal frameworks surrounding law enforcement, civil rights, and oversight practices, which can guide policy development and advocacy efforts.
- **Community engagement & coalition building**---strong ability to connect with community members, fostering trust and collaboration between law enforcement and the communities they serve.
- **Strategic planning**---skills and strategic thinking and planning, helping to set clear goals and direction for NACOLE's initiatives and priorities.
- **Public speaking**---strong communication skills for presenting ideas, engaging with stakeholders, and representing NACOLE at public events and forums.
- **Networking ability**---strong connections with various stakeholders, organizations, and community leaders that can assist in collaborative efforts and resource sharing.
- **Project management**---ability to manage projects and initiatives, from conception through implementation, ensuring timely and effective execution of NACOLE goals.

6. What goals do you have for your service on the NACOLE Board, what would you most like to accomplish as a Board member?

- **Collaboration and Partnership:** I think it is important to help NACOLE establish even further its leadership role in this field. I would help the organization further its collaboration and partnerships with organizations, stakeholders, and community groups to promote shared goals and enhance the effectiveness of oversight initiatives.
- **Expand the use of working groups** in the hopes of developing expertise for various aspects of civilian oversight and expanding the peer-to-peer network. Some examples of working groups that could be helpful are data, legal/lawyers, directly impacted people, and mental health impacts and alternative responses to police intervention.
- **Fostering Inclusivity:** NACOLE has this as a value, but how do we deepen our work in this area, especially in the current climate where police and militarism are becoming even more embedded into communities across the country. How do we become more a part of the solution.
- **Grow Organizational Capacity:** CPOC has done work with the staff of NACOLE and found it invaluable. Also, the current team is small but mighty. I would work to help secure funding so that the staff capacity can grow. By expanding the NACOEL staff, many more members of the community could benefit from their expertise. It will also help cities that are thinking of starting civilian oversight to be able to work with

NACOLE during the development, which I know many cities have already found helpful. This type of work expands the reach of civilian oversight and has a positive impact on this work across the country.