

CCSF considers arming campus police, buying body cameras



By Michael Barba on March 23, 2017

A proposal to put guns into the hands of campus police is once again stirring debate at City College of San Francisco, but this time Police Chief Andre Barnes is adding Tasers, body-worn cameras and de-escalation training to his wish list.

Concerned with the safety of his police force of 32 officers, Barnes is proposing that the college spend more than \$55,000 on weapons and training, including two dozen guns, 40 Tasers and 40 body cameras.

The proposal is the latest iteration of a more than decade-long debate over whether to arm campus police, which has historically pitted faculty and students against administrators and other staff members.

Interim Chancellor Susan Lamb has yet to take a stance on the issue, CCSF spokesperson Jeff Hamilton said Monday.

CCSF is the only community college in the Bay Area with sworn police officers who are unarmed. The college is unlike San Francisco State University and UC San Francisco, which both have armed police. Even the security force at University of San Francisco carries guns.

The proposal comes at a time when police, including the San Francisco Police Department, are under heightened scrutiny for fatal shootings of black and Latino people across the nation.

“This is a super important issue for folks to be aware of in San Francisco,” said CCSF Trustee Shanell Williams, noting the ouster of SFPD Chief Greg Suhr after a police killing last year. “We have to have that discourse before approving this.”

The proposal is the outcome of the college hiring an independent consultant to look into the possibility of arming campus officers after a gun scare at the Ocean Campus library in 2015, according to Hamilton.

The consultant, Steven Healy of the firm Margolis Healy, recommended arming the officers.

Barnes did not respond to requests for comment, but laid out his views in presentations to the Participatory Governance Council at CCSF twice in March. On March 16, the advisory council to the chancellor voted 7-4 in favor of the proposal.

CCSF faculty union head Tim Killikelly, one of the dissenting votes on the advisory council, said the American Federation of Teachers Local 2121 is concerned with the “proliferation of guns” on campus.

“It has been a tradition at the school for many years to not have guns on the campus,” Killikelly said. “Because there are guns, there may be some incidents on the campus that could be avoided if there [weren’t].”

Carl Koehler, a former police chief at CCSF, tried to arm his officers when he led the department between 2004 and 2007, but his proposal was “lost” in the participatory governance system at CCSF, never reaching the trustees.

“There are guns on campus every day,” said Koehler, now the undersheriff of Sheriff Vicki Hennessy. “It’s just that the police don’t have them.”

Between 2009 and 2014, college police confiscated 15 weapons from CCSF’s various campuses, including firearms and knives, according to Barnes.

But critics of the proposal argue that Ocean Campus is close enough to SFPD Ingleside Station in case a situation arises in which armed officers are needed, and also that arming police could lead to violence against students.

“Most students I have talked to aren’t in support of arming campus police,” said Vivek “JJ” Narayan, a CCSF student. “I think it would be a disaster.”

Narayan is part of a group called the CCSF Solidarity Committee, which is urging the chancellor and trustees to shoot down the proposal.

Lamb has not decided whether to make a recommendation on the proposal to the Board of Trustees, Hamilton said.

Though the council voted in favor of the proposal, it will be heard — and could be voted on — again at the next meeting May 18 after faculty and students raised concerns over potential Brown Act violations.

The proposal was only listed as a “public safety” item on the agenda, and Killikelly and Narayan said there was confusion over whether a vote would take place. Two students were not present for the vote, and two members of the academic senate abstained.