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Mpls. cops fall short on diversity - Number of black, Hispanic officers doesn't reflect populace.

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Author: MATT McKINNEY; STAFF WRITER

Facing a wave of police retirements, Minneapolis is scrambling to hire nearly 100 new officers by the end of this year, the largest addition to its ranks in recent history.

City officials acknowledge that at least 71 percent of the new hires are likely to be white, giving rise to concerns among minority groups that the racial makeup of the force — particularly blacks — is not keeping up with the rest of the city.

"I think we're going to be disappointed" in the diversity of the new hires, said City Council Member Blong Yang, who chairs the council's Public Safety Committee.

The issue of police force diversity has drawn national attention in recent days after a white officer fatally shot an unarmed black teenager in Ferguson, Mo.

The incident prompted protesters to clash with law enforcement in the suburban St. Louis community that has struggled with the racial makeup of its force.

Minneapolis police have about half the black and Hispanic officers they need to accurately reflect the city's population, records show. This comes despite years of diversity plans, legal action and a federal mediation agreement sparked by low levels of minority representation within the police.

Minneapolis police have been intensely committed to finding diverse candidates, said police spokesman John Elder.

"When we got the green light to hire, we went out and looked everywhere," he said. "We were out on the streets; we were in the churches. We know we have great talent in Minneapolis and we're doing our best to cultivate it."

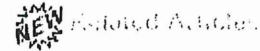
The wave of anticipated new hires was created by a surge in retirements. The force levels are lower than they have been in recent history, and the city has experienced an uptick in certain crimes.

Minneapolis leaders must balance their desire to improve diversity against intense political pressure to rapidly get the force back up to full strength.

"The mayor wants diversity; the chief wants diversity," said Lisa Clemons, a former Minneapolis police officer who is black. But the lack of better results "doesn't make sense."

The department's diversity problem falls unevenly across its ranks: while black and Hispanic officers number too few, American Indians and Asians are represented on the force in percentages that mirror the city's population.

Of the 807 officers and cadets in field training currently on the force, 78.9 percent are white, 9.2 percent are black, 5.2 percent are Asian, 4.1 percent are Hispanic and 2.5 percent are American Indian. Women made up 15 percent of the police force in 2013, down from 16.4 percent in 2003.



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Against that backdrop, neighborhood activists have pressed this summer for more information from the department about its hiring plans.

"My concern and our concern is that there seems to be room to hire new people but where are the people of color, particularly about African Americans?" asked **Peter Hayden**, part of the Community Standards Initiative, a group seeking more diversity.

The struggle to diversify the force has prompted some officers to go out into the community and recruit minority candidates themselves.

At a meeting earlier this summer, Minneapolis police officer Eric Lukes, who is black, detailed his efforts in his off-duty hours to find young people he can mentor for the department's Community Service Officer program, a path toward becoming a full-time officer. He said he currently is working with five candidates.

The group is hoping to get a meeting with Police Chief Janeé Harteau.

"I think the numbers are what they are not because of the lack of not trying," said police union president John Delmonico.

"I think the numbers are as good as they can get for what we have to work with in the big pool of law enforcement candidates."

Delmonico said it is tough to know how best to broaden the department's diversity.

City records show that the department had 60 black officers in 1997, but that number fell year over year until it was just 49 by 2003, or about 6 percent of the force in a city which is 18 percent black.

In that year, 2003, a federal mediation agreement brokered by the U.S. Department of Justice ordered the city to address the minority shortfall within the department. Some progress was made: today there are 74 black Minneapolis police officers, or 9.2 percent of the force.

"That was an initiative driven by community people," said Ron Edwards, a city activist who has closely watched the department's diversity numbers for years. He was among a group of people who sat on the now-disbanded Police Community Relations Council, which was created by the federal mediation agreement.

"I'm disappointed," Edwards said. He said if the city wants to make the police force mirror the city's diversity, the incoming classes should not only match that of the city, but have enough minority hires to make up the gap within the department.

Hiring plans

The City Council has authorized the department to hire enough officers to raise the department to 860 officers; it's currently near 770 officers on the street, one of the lowest numbers in 25 years.

The city has 1.9 officers per 1,000 residents, a ratio that puts it below St. Paul and many other Midwestern cities. The depleted force has seen response times rise while officers have reported stopping fewer suspicious vehicles and suspicious persons. Violent crime, meanwhile, has risen 4.7 percent so far this year.

A hiring push will have up to 100 join the force before the end of the year, Harteau has pledged, though many of the officers will still be in field training through the end of the year. Some of the hires are fresh out of the police academy, while others have experience in departments elsewhere and won't require as much field training.

Of all 85 of those potential hires — the cadets, recruits and hires with law enforcement experience — at least 60, about 71 percent, are white, according to the city figures. The number of white officers could be higher because some of the remaining 25 candidates didn't share their race when they applied, according to the City Attorney's office.

Matt McKinney • 612-217-1747

DIVERSITY DISPARITY

The Minneapolis police force has a smaller percentage of blacks than the rest of the city.

See microfilm/ pdf for chart

MINNEAPOLIS POLICE DEPARTMENT DISPARITY

Today's Minneapolis Police Department has 807 officers and cadets in field training. Department officials are wrestling with how to make the force more diverse. Here is a racial breakdown of the current Police Department and incoming recruits:

See microfilm / pdf for chart

Caption: Facing a wave of police retirements, Minneapolis is scrambling to hire nearly 100 new officers by the end of this year, the largest addition to its ranks in recent history. City officials acknowledge that at least 71 percent of the new hires are likely to be white, giving rise to concerns among minority groups that the racial makeup of the force — particularly blacks — is not keeping up with the rest of the city.

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