



January 13, 2017

For Immediate Release

Contact: contact@oaklandprivacy.org

Board of Supervisors Calls Sheriff to Account for Police Militarization

Oakland-On Tuesday, January 10, Sheriff Greg Ahern, founder of the annual militarized police exercise known as Urban Shield, appeared before the County Board of Supervisors to defend the controversial training.

Urban Shield is an annual trade show, anti-terrorism drill and emergency services training convened by the Alameda County Sheriff's Department with funding from the Department of Homeland Security via the Urban Strategic Areas Initiative (UASI).

The Board ultimately granted the Sheriff's request to accept the grant for Urban Shield, but not without serious scrutiny. Twelve reform principles, which included eliminating racially inflammatory merchandise, preventing the on-site sales of assault weapons and firearms, banning teams from foreign countries with documented human rights violations, no surveillance training, and no crowd control training were included as conditions of acceptance. They also approved Supervisor Carson's proposal for a time-limited 18-member task force, including representatives of the Sheriff's office, emergency responders and two representatives from the Stop Urban Shield Coalition. The task force will investigate and report on all aspects of Urban Shield.

Oakland Privacy member Susan Harman commented: "For perhaps the first time in a long time the Supervisors are taking seriously their legal obligation to supervise the Sheriff and to exercise their ability to oversee the Sheriff's grant funding. We approve."

More than a hundred speakers signed up for public comment, almost all in opposition to Urban Shield. Many had to leave before they were heard because the hearing, which began at 11:00 AM, went on into the late afternoon. While the Sheriff was given an hour-long presentation, the Stop Urban Shield coalition was not given a corresponding block of time to present a cogent counterargument; each member of the public had to content themselves with one minute to express their views on a complex topic.

Oakland Privacy supports the robust implementation of the 12 principles into the operations and conception of Urban Shield, if the event continues to be run by Alameda County. We continue to work to banish police militarization and its inevitable corollary - the perception of the public as the enemy - from all aspects of Bay Area policing.

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