Civilian Oversight Board Sees Fresh Opportunity to Address Police Issues With New Chief

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The board tasked with oversight of the Syracuse Police department says it is eager to get to know new Syracuse police chief Kenton Buckner. The Citizen Review Board examines grievances against officers and can recommend corrective action.

The Citizen's Review Board is eager to get to work with new Syracuse Police Chief Kenton Buckner.

Buckner most recently served as chief in Little Rock, Arkansas, which had no civilian oversight. CRB administrator Ranette Releford says it may take some time for Buckner to understand the board's role.

"The CRB has many aspects of civilian oversight that he is not used to. It's going to take a little bit of time to understand what our oversight entails, and how we can best work together to make sure the community and the police department benefit from the CRB."

The CRB has often struggled to get cooperation from officers in their investigations. Board Chair Peter McCarthy hopes Buckner's
fresh perspective can help change that and says several other issues need to be addressed.

"I think there's a real opportunity. There have been a number of issues identified by the CRB over the past several years that need to be addressed, use of force being at the top of the list, and a number of smaller issues. I hope that the new chief with some outside eyes and experience from elsewhere will be in a good position to make some of those changes."

McCarthy hopes Chief Buckner doesn’t feel that the board is out to get the police, one of the misconceptions about the CRB.

"In fact, the majority of our cases are not sustained, either because we determine the officers were correct, or because we can't get enough information. We look at every case carefully, and try to consider both sides, which is a problem when officers don't show up to talk."
While use of force complaints are a small fraction of total incidents that come to the CRB, the city has paid more than $5 million dollars over the past several years to settle them. Buckner has said he watched a recent forum on the department’s use of force policy. Releford is encouraged the chief has already taken an interest.

"I often say that the wall didn't come down in a day, and everything takes time. I know that it may take time, and I just hope there isn't a situation before it takes time."

Buckner, who was sworn in Monday, has yet to meet with the CRB, although officials hope it happens before month’s end. The CRB holds open meetings on the first Thursday of every month, including this Thursday, December 6, at 5:30 p.m. in Common Council Chambers at City Hall.