From: Maggie Smith Roedema
To: bbethune@cityofmyrtlebeach.com
Subject: [External]Cultural Awareness and Implicit Bias Training
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Dear Mayor Bethune,

First let me thank you for the work that you do for the community. I understand that in any times, the work you do can be incredibly challenging. In these times, I am sure it is more challenging than ever.

I am writing to say that it feels imperative that the City of Myrtle Beach Police Deparment implement Cultural Awareness and Implicit Bias training. I think we all need this, every single one of us. But as police officers, your jobs in this regard are much harder. And if you/we don't know what our biases are and how to override them, things can go very wrong.

I am writing to you about this because of something very powerful that was shared with me yesterday. I will include an excerpt.

"I am a 45 year old white woman living in the south, and today was the first time I spoke frankly about racism with a black man.
When Ernest, my appliance repairman, came to the front door, I welcomed him in. As this was his second visit and we'd established a friendly rapport, I asked him how he was feeling in the current national climate. Naturally, he assumed I was talking about the coronavirus, because what white person actually addresses racism head on, in person, in their own home?
When Ernest realized I wanted to know about his experience with racism, he began answering my questions.
What's it like for you on a day-to-day basis as a black man? Do cops ever give you any trouble?
The answers were illuminating.
Ernest, a middle-aged, friendly, successful business owner, gets pulled over in Myrtle Beach at least 6 times a year. He doesn't get pulled over for traffic violations, but on the suspicion of him being a suspect in one crime or another. Mind you, he is in uniform, driving in a work van clearly marked with his business on the side. They ask him about the boxes in his car--parts and pieces of appliances. They ask to see his invoices and ask him why there is money and checks in his invoice clipboard. They ask if he's selling drugs. These cops get angry if he asks for a badge number or pushes back in any way. Everytime he is the one who has to explain himself, although they have no real cause to question him.
Ernest used to help folks out after dark with emergencies. Not anymore. He does not work past dinnertime, not because he doesn't need the business, but because it isn't safe for him to be out after dark. He says "There's nothing out there in the world for me past dark".
Let me say that again. Ernest, a middle aged black man in uniform cannot work past dark in Myrtle Beach in 2020 because it's not safe for him. He did not say this with any kind of agenda. It was a quiet, matter of fact truth"

The times are changing. We all need to do better. And most of us need help to know how to do that.

I hope you will get that help for your officers and staff.

Thank you,

Maggie Roedema