

# Cedar-Riverside residents call for greater representation in Minneapolis Police Department

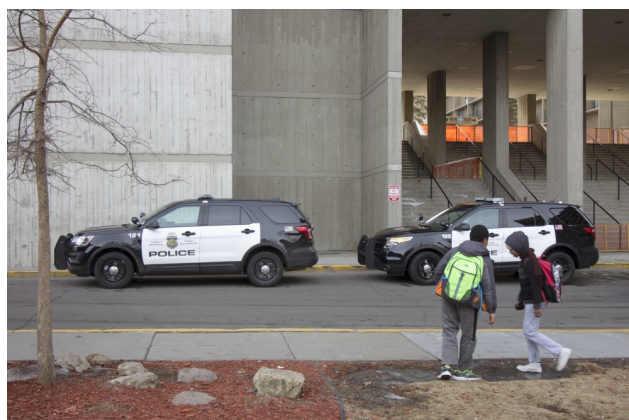
Members of the West Bank neighborhood are asking MPD to appoint more officers from their community.

## Isabella Murray

Cedar-Riverside residents and city officials are calling for greater diversity in the Minneapolis Police Department.

Neighborhood residents argue that having more East African officers on the force will build trust between police and the community. Requests for more East African officers came after two Somali officers patrolling Cedar-Riverside were promoted to sergeants.

“Constituents have come and asked for officers that speak their languages and understand them better,” said Ward 6 Minneapolis City Council member Abdi Warsame. “[Having East African officers] breaks down barriers of understanding between law enforcement and residents that can occur from language and cultural differences.”



Ananya Mishra

Two children walk past police cars parked outside Riverside Plaza on Monday, March 19. Residents of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood want to see more East African officers policing their community.



Just 8 percent of sworn MPD officers are of African American descent, according to MPD human resources consultant Dan Villarreal. MPD doesn't segment minority groups further than African American, Hispanic, Native American, Hawaiian and Asian.

While MPD numbers aren't specified further than general minority groups, Sergeant Dave Burbank said the department does have community engagement teams to conduct outreach with certain minority groups. There is an engagement team specifically for the East African community.

"We are working to diversify our police force, so there is a need to get more East African officers on the department," Burbank said.

Community service officers are part of this diversification process. CSOs assist the police department and community by mediating between department personnel and local communities. CSOs can eventually become full-time police officers, according to Burbank.

"We have three CSOs that are of Somali descent. We had four, but one was just promoted to the cadet academy to become a full-time officer," he said.



Two Somali police officers, Abdiwahab Ali and Mohammed Abdullahi, previously served the community. But the two left their roles as patrolling officers after being promoted to sergeants.

Though this was a success for the officers, Warsame said their departure has resulted in a loss of trust between the community and MPD.

“The neighborhood knew Officers Mo and Ali by name and asked for them by name during emergencies,” Warsame said. “That extreme sense of trust and comfortability was built over time and is hard to replicate with officers not as familiar with the community.”

Mohamed Ali, director of the Cedar Riverside Opportunity Center, said there’s been a notable shift in the officers community members confide in.

“With Mo and Ali, we’d be praying with them at the mosque, sitting with them at the restaurants. On Friday, you’d see them in uniforms, and on Saturday you’d play soccer with them,” he said.

Abdirizak Bihi, director of Somali Education and Social Advocacy Center, said some residents have noticed the loss of Ali and Abdullahi more than others, but the community has started to warm to their replacements.

“I walk around a lot and do a lot of social services in the community, and I see officers all over the place,” he said.

Still, Bihi acknowledged that Somali officers would better serve the community, as they could navigate language barriers and serve as role models for residents.

Warsame said he will meet with MPD Chief Medaria Arradondo soon to discuss adding more East African officers to the department.

