



Willie E. Bell NACOLE Board Member Biography

Willie E. Bell is an elected Police Commissioner for District 4 in Detroit, where he has been a longtime advocate for police accountability and community-led oversight of law enforcement as an essential protection for everyone's civil rights. The 11-member Detroit Board of Police Commissioners (BOPC) has elected him four times as chair of the board.

The City of Detroit Charter vests the BOPC with civilian oversight and supervisory control of the Police Department, which has some 2,500 sworn and 400 civilian employees. The Board has 28 administrative and investigative civilian professionals, who receive direction from the Board, particularly the chairperson. As the BOPC leader, Bell was responsible for committee assignments and represented the BOPC in meetings with other government officials, as well as residents, community and civic organizations, and other various and diverse stakeholders. All Board members serve as unpaid volunteers.

When the emergency manager stripped power from the Mayor, City Council and Police Commissioners during the city's historic bankruptcy in 2013, Bell led the grass-roots campaign with Michigan United to restore the Charter-mandated role of civilian oversight.

A Vietnam veteran, Bell became a police officer in 1971. His 32-year career included five years as the administrative lieutenant for the office responsible for the intake and investigation of public complaints of police misconduct. Bell was very active in civil rights organizations, including many related to police reform, professional standards, and accountability. He was a founding member of Concerned Police Officers for Equal Justice, bringing together black officers in Michigan communities at a time when many were breaking color barriers and facing discrimination on the job and witnessing unfair, harsh police tactics in black communities. Bell also served as President of the Detroit Guardians for 10 years and helped build collaborations across the country. He served two terms on the Board of Directors for the NAACP's Detroit Branch, one of its largest chapters.

Bell was an early supporter and participant in NACOLE. Beyond ensuring Detroit's membership and participation, Bell has advocated for NACOLE to expand its community outreach and mass communication, particularly as the federal role for police oversight shifted in 2017.

Bell holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Central Michigan University. He began his second four-year term as Police Commissioner in January 2018 and recently won the August 2021 primary election.

He is married and has two daughters and two grandchildren.