

# Winter Ice Storm Chills Public Hearing's Attendance

By Craig McGuire

The New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board found itself left out in the cold when a mid-January public meeting in downtown Brooklyn was canceled when no residents showed up to comment.

"When we planned this meeting, we didn't account for an ice storm," explained CCRB Executive Director Hector Soto, who added

that future meetings will be more aggressively advertised.

The CCRB is an independent mayoral agency with the power to investigate, make findings and recommend action on complaints concerning New York City police officers involving excessive use of force, abuse of authority, lack of courtesy, or use of

offensive language.

Legislation to give the city-funded mayoral agency an all-civilian board had been stalled in the City Council, but received renewed interest due in part to a raucous City Hall demonstration by police officers in the summer of 1992.

Subsequently, the legislation passed on July 5, 1993.

Between July 5 and December 31 of last year, the CCRB received 2,111 cases, 601 of which have been reviewed.

Soto pointed out that review boards have existed in New York City since the administration of former Mayor John Lindsay.

"Most major urban settings have one form of review board or another,"

said Soto, commenting that a review board comparable to the current one in New York exists in Washington D.C.

"The major issue of any review board has always been the mix of representation," remarked Soto.

Membership of the previous review board was divided in half between representatives from the police department and civilians appointed by the mayor.

The current 13-member board, all formally appointed by former Mayor David Dinkins, is comprised of one representative from each borough, designated by the City Council, three members with law enforcement experience designated by the Police Commissioner, and five members selected by the mayor.

"One thing that we are focusing on that they did not in the past is the substantiation rate," explained Soto. "Which includes the number of findings against an officer."

Of the cases reviewed by the current board, the substantiation rate -- that is, in which allegations are found to be true -- was 8.5 percent. The total rate for the previous board was 2.5 percent.

"This is not a crusade against police officers," Soto pointed out. "We are

only trying to establish a level playing field where citizens can feel comfortable bringing allegations against police."

Each member, which is appointed for a three-year term, receives a \$250 stipend per six-hour workload.

They full board meets once a month for a formal meeting, as well as a monthly panel meeting to review cases.

The members also meet in committee meetings as needed.

"The best community response we've had so far has been in Manhattan and the South Bronx," said Soto, who added that a meeting in Staten Island was also canceled due to low turnout.

Soto said a second series of community meetings is being scheduled for an undetermined date in the spring.

For now, Soto says, "We will be touching base with the various community boards, borough presidents and local government officials."

Complaints may be made by any person whether or not that person is a victim or witness to the incident by calling: 1-800-341-CCRB, or by contacting the local precinct stationhouse.