

THE DENVER POST
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*"There is no hope
for the satisfied man."*

Post founder Frederick G. Bonfils, 1861-1933

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THE POST EDITORIALS

Sensible new rules on police use of force

In the wake of the Paul Childs shooting death, the Hickenlooper administration has crafted wise guidelines on how police should handle the use of deadly force.

The anxiously awaited changes to Denver Police Department's use-of-force policy were unveiled by Mayor John Hickenlooper Thursday. They are at once significant and so utterly common-sensical as to make one wonder why they had to be written at all.

Or why they were not already departmental policy.

We applaud all those who toiled for months to map changes intended to help restore confidence in the city's police department after at least two deadly use-of-force killings since 2000.

Hickenlooper took decisive action after the shooting death of Paul Childs, a 15-year-old developmentally disabled boy, last July. In December, the mayor unveiled sweeping police changes, including \$2 million for police training and purchase of nonlethal weapons. In January, he assembled the 38-member task force of citizens, police and city officials to recommend changes to police use-of-force policies and citizen oversight of the department.

On Thursday, Hickenlooper said he has directed the police chief to implement the changes and to train officers about the new provisions.

The changes will be contained in the preamble to the police use of force policy. It re-emphasizes that the police recognize the value of human life and the value of preserving it; forbids officers from firing their weapons just to protect property; discourages officers from firing

from a moving vehicle except when defending themselves or others; reminds officers that a person may be unresponsive to their commands because they are mentally impaired; and tells police it's OK to try to defuse a dangerous situation rather than use deadly force.

Police Chief Gerry Whitman said the changes amount to a statement to the community about police values. But he underscored that even without the new preamble, police already have a focus to serve and protect.

"We're in the business of preserving human life," he said. And he said police routinely try to defuse potentially deadly situation. "We de-escalate all the time ... every day," he said.

Task force member and former judge Federico Alvarez said the changes are "fairly significant" and are intended to "soften the impression that police are our adversaries."

Alvarez said that in addition to re-emphasizing to police officers that "life is precious," the task force acknowledged that police officers have dangerous jobs and are often in harm's way. He said it is important to ensure they have options to handle dangerous situations with the least amount of harm to themselves or to potential suspects.

Hickenlooper is pursuing additional changes, including enhanced civilian oversight of the police department, which would require voter approval this November. Another significant step, and utterly common-sensical.