

Kathleen O'Toole—A Law Enforcement Leadership Profile

Voiceover

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hello everyone and welcome to *The Beat*. I'm your host, Jennifer Donelan. Today we are honored to be speaking with our next guest, Kathleen O'Toole. Chief O'Toole is one of the highest regarded and experienced law enforcement executives in our nation's history. So we've got a lot to talk about and I cannot again express how excited we are to have you with us, Chief O'Toole.

Chief Kathleen O'Toole

00:40

Well, thank you very much, Jennifer, and thank you for those very kind comments. I just feel blessed. I've had so many wonderful opportunities throughout my career.

Donelan

00:48

I'm jealous, quite frankly. You've been everywhere, coast to coast and across the pond. So just to give our listening audience a taste of your career, a quick bird's-eye view. Chief O'Toole is an American law enforcement officer who served as Chief of the Seattle Police Department from 2014 to 2017. She was previously the first female Commissioner of the Boston Police Department. In 2006, she announced she was leaving Boston to move to Ireland, and in Ireland, she was the first Chief Inspector of the Garda Inspectorate, which was established to ensure the National Police Service there operated efficiently. The Inspectorate reported directly to Ireland's Minister for Justice and Equality. And then she returned here to the United States to take her position in Seattle.

Her career also includes service as Lieutenant Colonel of the Massachusetts State Police from 92 to 94. She was appointed to the cabinet position of Secretary Executive Office of Public Safety in Massachusetts in 1994, and served in that position until 1998. She then, at that time, became a member of the Patten Commission. Now that is a landmark commission headed by Lord Patten of Barnes, which reformed policing in Northern Ireland, and it led to the formation of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Again, just an amazing career, and I can't tell you how honored we are to have you with us. So I'd like to just start off with the beginning. What motivated you to get involved in law enforcement in the first place?

O'Toole

02:15

Well, Jennifer, I wish I could say that there was something strategic about it all, but I think it's just been hard work and great mentors, and certainly wonderful support from family. But I was a Boston College undergraduate when the first female patrol officers were hired in Boston and at the time I thought—I think it was 1974—I thought, “Why would any woman in her right mind take that job?”

And only a few years later, a friend of mine wanted to be a police officer in the worst way, so I agreed to go along and take the test just to show moral support. And I thought the test-taking experience would be valuable because I was preparing to take the LSAT. I wanted to go to law school. I later discovered that through some administrative error, my name was left off the list for hiring at the Boston Police Department. And when I discovered that, I was a second year law student. I was attending law school at night.

Well, there's nothing probably more obnoxious than a first- or second-year law student. So I thought, “Well, I think that I need to bring a case before the Civil Service Commission and determine where this process went awry.” So I was doing it just for experience, and I thought maybe my professors will give me some credit for bringing this case before the Civil Service Commission, never intending to take the job with the Boston Police. And then, sure enough, I represented myself, they called my bluff, they offered me the job. My friends in law school dared me to take it thinking it would be an interesting opportunity to experience the law from a different perspective. And here I am four decades later. So, yeah, I think that and I feel so blessed, because in retrospect I couldn't imagine myself sitting in an office doing legal research for the last 40 years.

I really enjoyed being out in the community providing service to people, and I still reflect on my early days as a Boston police officer. And those were absolutely my favorite days in my career.

Donelan

04:17

I think hands down that's my favorite story about how you got into policing. That is incredible.

O'Toole

04:22

Yeah, I took the job on a dare.

Donelan

04:22

That—

O'Toole

04:22

Yeah, I took the job on a dare.

Donelan

04:25

That is amazing. I love that. I'm never going to forget that. I don't think our listeners will forget that. So let's go back to those early days. What was your first assignment? Your duty station?

O'Toole

04:35

Well, at first I went to the Academy, of course, and the Academy was very rigorous. But back in those days we were taught to go out and fight the war on crime. And it was really the police versus the community, go out there, make arrests. And we were measured by how many arrests we made, how many tickets we wrote, how quickly we arrived at our 911 calls. And it was exciting. It was exhilarating. I loved that part of the business, you know, racing around, answering 911 calls.

But I soon discovered that's only a fraction of what police actually do. I think we do a horrible job of telling our own story. In reality, police spend much more time responding to calls to assist vulnerable people. I had the opportunity, the privilege, of saving a couple lives, delivering a few babies, you know, being there for people in need at their most challenging times. And I think I was only on the job for about six months when I thought, "Wow, you know, I've found my true vocation. This is not just a job. This is something I really love."

Donelan

05:36

Do those moments... We just went over your list of accolades in your stellar career, do those lists of moments—delivered a few babies, saved a few lives—are those the moments that stand out for you?

O'Toole

05:46

Yes. For me those are so much more important than... I appreciate some of the awards and some of the recognition I've received. I've been humbled by that. But again, I just feel so fortunate that I found a career I loved. I grew up in a family where my dad was a public school teacher. My uncle was a missionary priest. There was always this emphasis on providing service to others, trying to help other people. And I really appreciate the fact that I was exposed to that as a youngster, because I think that helped me make some of my decisions, my career decisions, later.

Donelan

06:21

Sure. And in the final analysis, those are the moments that we look back on—what do we do for others? Those are the things that really truly impact one's spirit. That's just amazing.

One of the things that I'd like to talk to you about is being a woman in a male-dominated field, but I am sure that this is something you have been talking about for four decades and I don't know if it's something that you're like, "You know what? I'm just a person. Can we get past that?" Or is it something that you embrace and say, "Yeah, sure. Let's talk about it."

O'Toole

06:46

No, I always say, "Sure. Let's talk about it." I think it's important to talk about it. I didn't have any female mentors. There were very few women in policing at the time. In fact, I think there were just a few dozen in the Boston Police Department, certainly less than 100, when I started. So all of my mentors were male. And I have to say that they were extraordinary people, like Bill Bratton, who was my mentor in Boston. When he was only 32 years old, he was the number two in the Boston Police Department. He went on to be Police Commissioner in Boston, New York City Police Commissioner on two occasions, and also served as the Chief out in L.A. But he tapped me on the shoulder when I was only 32, and gave me an extraordinary opportunity to work on his command team.

I also had some great mentors in people like Governor Bill Weld. When he called me in and offered me the job as Secretary of Public Safety, my response was, "Governor, I've never really been involved in partisan politics and I thought these jobs were reserved for people who are." And he chuckled, laughed, and said, "I have enough of them around. Actually, I think you're a pretty good cop." And he was a wonderful role model, very principled. He always said that principle was more important than politics. He never meddled on a day-to-day basis in the business, but he was always there to back us up when we needed support and guidance.

And then Chris Patten who was the chair of the Patten commission in Northern Ireland. I learned so much from him in that very divided environment. I reminisce a lot about that these days, because I think there are lessons I learned there that are relevant here in this country now. But it was such a divided environment, and Patten said, "You know, we'll just go where the truth takes us." And he was such a decent, principled person. But I learned so many lessons from those male mentors.

I have lots of female friends that didn't have that advantage, or that faced a lot more obstacles than I did. But I just kept my head down. There were times when I felt maybe I had to go a bit beyond to prove myself as a woman, whether I was out in the field or whether I was in a management position, but I just worked hard. And as I said, I don't claim to have all the answers. I've certainly made my mistakes and learned from them, but I was very fortunate to have support from my colleagues and to have great mentors. And but for their support, I wouldn't be where I am today.

Donelan

09:09

I think you do... Is you talk to women who are the first. You're the first female Commissioner of the Boston Police Department. There were no other women ahead of you in that position, you were the first. And when you talk to women who are at the top of their agencies, oftentimes they do talk about those male mentors, and everybody's sort of expecting there to be these female mentors. But in these male-dominated fields, they didn't exist. And I know now more and more we're seeing that, but it's those male mentors who, you know, you stand on their shoulders and with their encouragement and advice.

And like you said that hard work isn't something that quite frankly—I think is something that we should just mention and look past—because I'm assuming when you talk about that, you not necessarily... I didn't hear you describe it as unfair but you knew that you sort of cross your Ts and dot your Is because of the perception, or because you knew you had to in order to prove yourself?

O'Toole

10:10

Well, maybe I was proving as much to myself as anyone else.

Donelan

10:10

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

O'Toole

10:13

I've always categorized myself as a workaholic. I'm sure my husband and daughter would agree with that. Thankfully, they've been incredibly supportive. But yeah, I think I always tried to pull my weight. I really always just wanted to do a good job. But I think in policing, it's an interesting business, because one doesn't establish credibility sitting behind a desk as the chief. You really need to establish your credibility early in your career, when you're out there on the front lines working side by side with people. And again, I had the opportunity to do that in Boston as a patrol officer, as a detective, as a decoy officer. So all of those experiences I think cumulatively helped as I rose through the ranks.

Donelan

10:57

And I think it's interesting too. Women in policing, as you were coming up, and now the topic of women in policing in present day, there has been so much that law enforcement as a whole has faced in recent months and years that understandably so, there's been a pivot to these very large scale and important critical issues facing law enforcement in America. But where on the scale do you feel that the topic of women in policing is now, and is it where it needs to be? Or have we arrived?

O'Toole

11:28

Well, that's a really interesting question. Certainly, we've recruited lots more women into policing, but certainly not enough. And, sadly, I think that's because, as I alluded to earlier, we don't tell our own story. And I'm not sure that candidates truly understand what police do. If you watch these shows on television, one would think it's all about racing around in cars, and gunfights, and fighting crime, when policing goes so far beyond that.

So I think that over the years, while we've recruited more women, I think we need to do a much more effective job of recruiting not just for women, but you know, to get a really diverse candidate pool. Diverse in every respect, not just in terms of race and gender, but diversity of thought as well. We need people with a variety of experiences—a variety of life experiences, a variety of educational experiences. And I think our organizations are much stronger.

Donelan

12:28

When you mentioned earlier about some of the lessons that you learned coming up that are relevant present day, what were you talking about there?

O'Toole

12:36

Well, I was talking about my experience in Northern Ireland. When I went there to work on the peace process as part of the Patten Commission. It was really, truly a life-changing experience for me to walk into a society that was so divided. It just seemed like there was no light at the end of the tunnel. I actually started traveling to Northern Ireland before the ceasefire, before the peace process, so I had an opportunity to see just how challenging it was.

I recall my first visit there. I was asked to go over and do a series of lectures on community policing. It was the early 1990s. And when I arrived, they were very proud to announce that they had just established their first community policing team in West Belfast. And they said, "Look, before you start your lecture series here, we'd love to have you go visit our community policing team and maybe even go out on patrol with them." And I said, "Oh, that would be awesome. I'd love to do that."

Donelan

13:31

Yeah.

O'Toole

13:32

So I arrived at this police facility that was surrounded by barbed wire and huge walls, and it was truly a fortress. Getting into it was a challenge. Once I was admitted, and met the community policing team for a few minutes, they said, "Okay, we're headed off on patrol." And then the next thing you know, I was in the back of an armored Land Rover with a flak jacket surrounded by people with rifles and other types of weapons. And we went out on a community policing patrol with a military escort.

Every time we stopped at a light, somebody came up from a gun turret or something in the military vehicle and did a 360 scan to see if there were any threats on the horizon. And then, on two occasions, we stopped in neighborhoods and exited the Land Rover, but very carefully with weapons drawn, you know, walked down the street for a block, and that was the definition of community policing in Northern Ireland at the time.

Donelan

14:32

Yeah, I know. Wow!

O'Toole

14:33

So all I could think of was that I remember hearing a quote once by George Bernard Shaw, about two countries separated by a common language. I said, "Community policing in Northern Ireland was a far cry from our definition of it here in the U.S.," but I learned and I saw how that incredibly divided society was able to progress over the course of the next decade. And, I mean, they'll be long, you know, for generations... There have been and will continue to be tensions, but it's an entirely different place than it was before. And the vast majority of people are living there and are peaceful, and you know, relatively prosperous environment now.

Donelan

15:18

Well—

O'Toole

15:19

And there's still challenges in the inner cities like there are here.

Donelan

15:22

Sure.

O'Toole

15:23

You know, people who don't have the opportunities, that don't have the educational opportunities, the job opportunities. I mean, they have to work on the same social issues there that we need to work on here. But I'm the eternal optimist given some of the experiences I had there.

Donelan

15:37

Well, and I was going to say, I mean, there must be so much there that you learned that you could then turn around and apply to this country. I mean, I think that there are many who feel like the division in this country at this moment in time is so stark that they can't see a light at the end of the tunnel, that policing in America right now... Will we ever turn the corner where it's looked upon by the majority as necessary, and as critical as it is to our daily lives instead of all the negativity that has come in recent times? So are there lessons that you learn there in Ireland, having seen all of that? Because you're right, everything you described, I'm like, "That's not community policing. That's warfare." What lessons do you share with us here, based on what you learned there?

O'Toole

16:19

Well, I'll talk a little bit about community policing, because it's a phrase that's been used fairly liberally since early in my career. In the 1980s, we started to see more community policing programs emerge across the country. But at the time, it was more of an assignment or a unit in a police organization. They pretty much excused everybody else from doing it.

Donelan

16:42

Right. You're right.

O'Toole

16:43

Again, I mentioned my experience in the Academy where we were taught to go out and fight the war on crime, and then discovered that policing went well beyond that.

In the 1990s in Boston, we started to work on some of the gang violence, for instance, in multidisciplinary approaches to help young people get beyond some of the challenges they were facing in Boston and elsewhere in Massachusetts. That focus really paid off in great dividends. It reduced homicide rates, we helped develop programs to support young people as opposed to just reacting and arresting people. When I first started in the business, it was all about law enforcement, and it was very reactive.

We've evolved now so that prevention and intervention are equally important. And the police play an important role in that, but the police can't do that alone. So I think that right now, with all the concern around policing, it's difficult to see the evolution that's occurred over the last three or four decades. But we're in a much different place now than we were when I first came on the job. And I guess if there's one point I'd really like to emphasize is that the police need to reform and innovate. We'll never finish that job. We should constantly look to improvement. How can we get better? How can we use new tools? How can we engage to a greater extent with our community? So that goes without saying. But if we're working on the police problem alone, we're not going to solve the challenges we're facing in our communities.

Donelan

18:20

No. And you hear them talking more and more about trying to get social welfare involved and mental health involved, because a police officer in the modern age wears so many different hats, as you discussed. I mean, it's not just the stereotypical that you see on television, "Hey, we got a 911 call, let's go." You can be a counselor on one call, you could be a doctor on another call. And that's a lot for these law enforcement officers. But I think that the recognition of the industry and sort of trying to bring in partners to help us with that is a big key. And I think something you said too, that it's a job that's never finished. It has to continue to evolve.

O'Toole

18:53

Yeah, we need to embed this culture of innovation and into our organizations I believe. But, again, I don't think we can overstate the importance of these multidisciplinary approaches. And I'll just point to a few examples.

Donelan

19:06

I was going to ask. Yes, please.

O'Toole

19:08

Yes. So again, I mentioned the 1990s. In the early 90s, I think Boston in one year had 154 homicides. One is too many, but 154, you know, that was when the city maxed out. And I think that the community, the police department, everybody reached the saturation point and said, "Look, obviously we've been trying hard but we need to do business a different way." And barriers were broken down, community leaders came to the table, the faith-based community played a huge role. I was working as Secretary of Public Safety at the time. Paul Evans did a wonderful job as a Police Commissioner in Boston during that period. And the police department in Boston and police departments around the state recognized the need to focus more on prevention and intervention, but in doing so they had to partner with other organizations.

So in Boston, for instance, the police partnered with Probation and Parole and other facets of the criminal justice system, you know, the Youth Justice Services and departments like that. Also, with education, social services, health services, and it was truly a remarkable partnership. And then when I became Commissioner in the early 2000s, we were able to continue some of those efforts, those multidisciplinary approaches, and actually get into homes and engage with people. It was a more focused approach where we focused on families and individuals that we knew were really struggling.

And we tried to get in there, particularly to address concerns about young people who were turning to violence. And we'd get into their homes and tried to help determine: Did they need tutoring? Did they need a summer job? Did they need some type of mentoring program? Did the younger kids need summer camps? Did they need food in their refrigerator?

So it was a multidisciplinary approach to try to put our arms around some of these kids and some of their families to try to keep them on the right track—prevention and intervention—so we didn't have to resort to enforcement.

And I think that in Boston, over the course of I think six or seven years, during the 90s, the Boston Police Department was able to reduce that 154 homicides down to 31. Again, 31 too many, you know?

Donelan

19:08

Sure.

O'Toole

21:16

In Seattle, our greatest challenge was at the intersection of public health and public safety, and homelessness, mental health crisis, addiction conditions. And when I arrived out there, they were barely tracking crime stats. I mean, they're tracking enough crime stats to send them in or report them to the federal government, but we drilled down, we did a better job of tracking crime. But then we also started to track all the other work police did. And we determined that nearly 10,000 times a year, police officers in Seattle responded to somebody in serious mental health crisis.

Donelan

21:51

Wow.

O'Toole

21:51

Now it would be easy to say is we're rethinking policing at this point, "Well, turn all that work over to clinicians. Turn all that work over to social workers." But then if you can take a closer look at that data, many of those people were threatening themselves. A large percentage, I think up to 50 percent, were either threatening themselves or someone else. And a good percentage of them were also armed. So we have to be very thoughtful about how we rethink some of these responses. But we should be harnessing resources, we should be working as partners on community safety solutions. It's not just about policing.

We need to better train police, we need to have the right policies and procedures in place, we need to recruit the right people, we need to hold them accountable. We can do all that work on policing, but if we're really going to promote a model of community safety, we need to do in concert with partners.

Donelan

22:46

And something you said earlier too—community policing shouldn't just be a unit. It should be the overall goal and intention and mission of an entire agency, correct?

O'Toole

22:55

Absolutely. It should be the foundation on which everything is built. And we really need to engage and engage authentically. I've been to a lot of community policing meetings where the police sit up front and report out and provide information to the community, but there's no real authentic engagement. That's

not community policing. Community policing is when people in the community and cops on the front lines come together, discuss the challenges they're all facing, and work on solutions that will produce good results.

In Seattle, we developed—we call them our community policing micro plans—we had a city of neighborhoods in Seattle, proud neighborhoods, very similar to Boston, you know, city of proud neighborhoods.

Donelan

22:55

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

O'Toole

23:42

And each neighborhood... We worked with Seattle University as an academic partner, and we went out to each neighborhood and we had police officers working in those neighborhoods, and people living and working in those communities developed the top three to five priorities that they thought the police should focus on and work together on. And it was remarkably successful effort. Of course, the police are always going to focus on violent crime and Part 1 crime—

Donelan

23:42

Sure.

O'Toole

24:11

—but most people are more concerned about quality of life issues in their neighborhoods. So anyway, I don't want to get too far off on that tangent.

Donelan

24:19

No, I know our listeners are hanging on your every word, so please, no. Keep going.

O'Toole

24:24

I'm just a real advocate for getting out there, and again, that authentic engagement with people in neighborhoods, in local neighborhoods. I really think that community policing should be built grassroots from the bottom up with people living and working in neighborhoods having a voice as to what the priority should be.

And police officers on the front lines too. As the Chief, it wasn't appropriate for me to—especially out in Seattle—go into a new city and dictate the community policing strategy from the top down. I wanted to build it grassroots from the bottom up.

Donelan

24:58

You said something earlier about how law enforcement isn't great about telling their own story. The efforts that you discussed in both Boston and Seattle—how much of the community knew about that? Like, really knew about that? And how did you get that story out?

O'Toole

25:13

Well, in Seattle, I was fortunate that I had some pretty creative people in the Public Information Office, and they were great at social media. I just don't think you can communicate enough. And again, I'm not saying just feel-good, pro-police commercials. I think that transparency is so important. If you look at the Seattle Police website, we were publishing everything. All of our use of force data. We'd anonymize some of it, of course, to protect privacy issues, but we provided as much data as we could to the community, so that they had a better sense for what we were doing.

When we determined that we were dealing with 10,000 people a year in mental health crisis, we put all that data out there in the form of a report, so that our community could see what we're actually doing. I mean, transparency is so important. And I think, historically, in policing, for whatever reason, the culture was to guard information, you know, "Well, we can't tell you anything yet. It's under investigation. We'll get back to you."

I learned from my mentors, and from my own personal experience, that whether it's a good story, or a bad news story, stand up, tell the truth, take responsibility, give people as much information as you can. And they genuinely appreciate that, because they know you're being straight with them.

And also, I think that police leaders—police at every rank—should try to get out to the greatest extent possible and engage with people in the community, because you know what? When you get together on a human level, you realize you actually have a lot more in common than you ever would have imagined.

Donelan

26:51

And that's that relationship by relationship. And it may seem, you know, overwhelming, and that may not make a dent, but it actually will. Mother Teresa said, "One life at a time," and look what she did. So I think you're right. From the grassroots up and every opportunity possible.

There's also social media now. So law enforcement really is afforded an opportunity that in the past, they didn't have, which is they have methods by which as you talked about with your Public Information Office, you have opportunities to tell your own story, and not have to wait and rely on the media to do it.

And I do think you're right. I think that transparency is the medicine. Truth may not feel comfortable sometimes, but it will set you free. So thank you.

O'Toole

27:34

I think that's so important. You're absolutely right. And I mean, there have been times when it's been incredibly difficult to stand up, and in the midst of a tragedy or a disaster or even in Boston, I had to stand up. When I was Commissioner, I'd only been in the job for a few weeks when a very sad, wrongful conviction was announced. And I had to stand up and apologize to that person who'd spent decades in jail for a crime he hadn't committed.

So you know, on a human level, it can be hard, but I think in terms of police legitimacy and public trust we need to just provide the facts. And then if it's a bad news story, we need to tell the truth, take responsibility, and then work with the community to ensure that we address any weaknesses that we identify.

Donelan

28:23

Right. And I think that you earned a lot of credit with that. So that when the bad thing does happen, at least the community can trust the fact that what's coming out of the mouths of their law enforcement is true, because they've told the good and the bad, and they'll forgive you for it, and you can keep moving forward. So I think that your advice for the rest of the law enforcement profession is right on and what's necessary.

So we've been talking around this and talking about this, but just to directly talk about how we've all been changed, and America has been changed by what we saw and experienced following the worldwide aftermath of the death of George Floyd, are these the changes that you think that is the strategy for American policing moving forward? Transparency, community policing?

O'Toole

29:05

It's really heart wrenching for me to see some jurisdictions respond with knee-jerk reactions to these very important issues. The slogans that have emerged, "Defund, reimagine." Look, call it what you want to call it, but please engage in thoughtful dialogue before making any decisions. And I'll give you an example. Again, in Seattle, they've been talking a lot about slashing the police budget, and without any specific plan, you know, just, "We'll come up with a percentage and we'll just slash the police budget." Well, are they considering when they're slashing that budget that the police are responding to these 10,000 calls a year for people in mental health crisis? And if we make irresponsible decisions based on emotion only, or political agendas only, I'm really concerned about the negative impact that it could have on communities across this country.

So I'm the first one. I've been a strong proponent of reform and innovation for the past several decades in my career. Really, that's been my top priority. But I just hope that as we continue this process, that we have very thoughtful discussions about it.

I'm not saying there shouldn't be a sense of urgency. I like to see things get done. I don't think we should spend the next five years strategizing and planning. The world moves at a fast pace. We need to be nimble, we need to be responsive, we need to get things done, but let's do things in a very responsible, thoughtful way. And I really think that we need to get all partners at the table. And not just fix the police problem, but you know, fix the wider system and come up with holistic solutions that will make our communities safer and more vibrant, and provide opportunities for everybody going forward.

So I think that, yeah, there are good things we can do in terms of use of force policies. We need to train police and require them to de-escalate. We need to give them skills in dealing with people in mental health crisis. We need to do courses on implicit bias and bias-free policing. We need to recruit the right people. There's so many things we can do in policing. I think a lot of those best practices have been out there for a few years now that other jurisdictions can learn from. But I think even more so we have to get other people to the table, other community partners and really figure out... Like, let's get it right this time.

You know, I lived through Rodney King. I was out in Seattle post Ferguson. George Floyd's murder is not the first crisis in policing that I've lived through. Let's really think about it and get it right this time. And we need to involve others. Others need to step up and play their parts in that as well.

Donelan

31:59

And I think others really do need to understand the world of policing. As a show host, I'm Switzerland, right, and I don't pass opinions, but I will say, knowing what I know about law enforcement, I think that everything you've just described doesn't require a taking away of funds. It actually requires massive investment, and that the opposite of what is being suggested should be happening in order to make those changes necessary. And you're right.

I mean, it doesn't need to be delayed. It needs to happen now. But it is a full-scale, wide-scale, it involves more people than just the police, and it's going to require time, money, and the community and we as a country need to be ready to make those investments in order to move forward.

O'Toole

32:38

You know what has been heartening for me lately?

Donelan

32:41

Hmm?

O'Toole

32:41

The private sector's response to a lot of the incidents recently. The private sector's response and commitment now to social justice. And I'm not saying that they necessarily have it right yet.

Donelan

32:41

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

O'Toole

32:57

But I appreciate the fact that the corporate world is finally recognizing that maybe they have some responsibility here too.

Donelan

33:05

Sure.

O'Toole

33:05

Because you're right, police reform is expensive. In Seattle, the U.S. Department of Justice conducted an investigation, determined that there were constitutional violations by the police there, entered into a consent decree in 2013, I believe it was. I arrived in 2014 to implement the new plan for reform, and it has cost the city over \$100 million for that police reform only. You know, with new technology systems, with new training. So reform can be expensive.

I don't think it needs to be that expensive. I think that some of the cities now that have been through some of those reform processes, can provide examples to others that they can learn from and adopt. So I think we can do a more efficient job of reform and innovation in policing. But you're right, there's going to have to be an investment.

When I was on Seattle, I went to meet with Howard Schultz at the time who was the CEO of Starbucks, and I just met with him as a courtesy. He lived in the city, their headquarters was located in the city, and I thought, "What am I going to have in common with this guy, you know? But it'll be interesting to meet him anyway." And within the first five minutes, I learned that he grew up in the most dangerous housing development in Brooklyn, New York, and overcame all kinds of personal, you know, family challenges, as a young person grew up in a very difficult environment and somehow, you know, went on to, again, persevere and have an extraordinary career.

When I was leaving his office. He said, "Well, if I could do something for the Police Department, what would that be?" I think he probably expected I'd say "Well send us coffee machines or help us purchase some new vehicles or something," and I said—

Donelan

34:55

Right.

O'Toole

34:55

My response was, "Hire inner-city kids." And I said, "Because that's what we need to do. We need to put our arm around some of these kids who are underserved, and we need to provide them with better educational opportunities, mentoring opportunities, job opportunities." I said, "I know this works, I've seen it work." And Starbucks was already working on an initiative that they eventually launched, where they committed to hiring tens of thousands of young people as part of their opportunity youth program. So that's what we should be doing.

And John Hancock Insurance in Boston, when I was Commissioner there, they had an extraordinary program, Summer of Opportunity, where they brought young people in. Most of these kids probably wouldn't have expected to graduate from high school. They brought them in, they had mentors, the company actually appealed to many of their employees who provided mentorship and tutoring and job opportunities, internships, and the vast majority of those young people not only graduated from high school, they went on to college. So I know that this works. And that's what's really going to make a difference in this world.

Donelan

36:02

Well, I'm curious to know your thoughts on this, because it seems like such a basic question, but I don't think it's a basic answer—and you might have one—but when you have a Black person in America say, "I am afraid when I get pulled over by the police." What do we do about that fear?

O'Toole

36:17

That really, really saddens me. Well, first of all, I think we need more diverse police services. We need to have police services to reflect the communities they serve.

Donelan

36:26

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

O'Toole

36:26

So when Black or Brown people or people representing different cultural backgrounds engage with the police, more often they're going to be engaging with people who look like them, and who share a lot of life experience that's like theirs. So I think that's one thing we need to do. And by the way, this applies wherever we are in the world. That was a huge issue in Northern Ireland.

Donelan

36:50

That's why I'm asking you because you saw that there, and it didn't go along racial lines. It's along the religion and all, but that's why I'd love to know your opinion on that.

O'Toole

36:59

Yeah, I think one of our strongest recommendations was on recruitment, and the need to significantly increase the number of Catholic officers at the time in the RUC, because it was well over 90–95 percent Protestant, and some would say Unionists, you know, pro-union, pro-British, and the minority community there did not feel that it was representative of them or their ideology. So it was very, very divided, and there was a lot of anti-police sentiment there. I mean, it was truly a war. And I think that again, we need to engage.

We have this exceptional Exploring Program, I'm actually the National Chair of the Police Explorers Program. Part of the Learning For Life Program that was originally established by the Boy Scouts of America, Learning For Life, it's one of the exploring programs, and there's a Law Enforcement Exploring Program. So we had a very successful exploring program in Seattle. It's still a wonderful program. And young people between the ages of, I want to say 14 and 21, if I recall correctly, come in and serve in a volunteer capacity. And they learn a lot about law enforcement and policing. They do a lot of community engagement, community events. It's just a phenomenal program.

The vast majority of participants in Seattle were young people of color. And first of all, I admired their courage, because they were often coming from neighborhoods that had tense relationships with the police. But you know, they took that leap of faith. And I think that's what we need to do. We need to better inform young people of the opportunities. They need to have a clearer understanding of what policing is all about, that it's not just about going out and arresting people, and that most of it is providing help and service to people.

And we need to, again, attract more people to the job so that it'll be more representative, and people won't have those fears when they encounter the police. Nobody can deny the historical role that police played in this country along the lines of race. A dear friend of mine, Terry Cunningham, was Police Chief in Wellesley, Massachusetts, but went on to be the President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

And few years ago, he stood up at the annual meeting with thousands and thousands of police chiefs from all across the world, and acknowledged the role that police in this country have played in terms of racism and apologized and indicated that we all need to work together to get beyond that. You know, to acknowledge it, but to get beyond it.

Donelan

39:42

To heal and move. And a lot of what you've talked about in terms from a gender perspective, and from diversifying and moving forward and reflecting our communities, right now is a pretty difficult time or... You give me your opinion on attracting people to the profession, and how do you get past that to bring in the very people you're talking about?

O'Toole

40:03

Well, that's it. If we're going to make this better, we need to get the right people. People are going to have to take a leap of faith. You know, again, I'll remain optimistic because I've seen that happen on the other side of the Atlantic.

Again, I think if people understood what a wonderful career policing can be if done right—if we select the right people, give them the appropriate policies and direction, if we train them properly, if we hold them accountable when they do things that are inappropriate—we just need to get all of that right. Again, I hope that there are a lot of young people out there who will take that leap of faith, because I think that they can be part of something that's exciting, that's going to help this country heal, and that's going to create safer and more vibrant neighborhoods for all of us.

Donelan

40:51

We should have had recruitment tables out there at the protests because you know, you bring in that energy and that vigor and that desire for change, then come on in, you know, everyone's welcome. And I love the leap of faith. And I want to give you an opportunity here to talk about anything that we didn't talk about. But I don't think that there's anything more accurate and fitting, is that we all take that leap of faith. We do what needs to be done, we don't hang it all on a prayer, but we do what needs to be done. You've seen it, you've witnessed it, that it can improve, it will get better if we all just make that investment.

O'Toole

41:24

And it really will require a lot of work, no question about it. That leap of faith, I'll repeat that again. I worked with a really cool guy who was on my staff in Seattle. He was a young Black man in the community who had a number of, I would say concerning encounters with the police as a young man, and he made a decision, "Look, I can complain about this, and turn my back and walk away, or I can try to change things from the inside out." And he took that leap of faith and joined the Seattle Police Department. And during the course of his career—he's a bit younger than I am, but he's been around for a while—he has mentored countless high school students who've gone on to college. He's been able to do wonderful work in the community while serving as a police officer.

So again, I think we need to do a better job of telling our story and get the right people to jump on board, and hopefully, we can all work hard at the healing process and create a better model for safety in our communities.

Donelan

42:29

Right. Because you know, and I mean, I'm talking to you, I'm so glad you took that leap and that dare and ended up in this profession, because you and your words and what you've seen, and your thoughts give us all hope and inspiration. And also, it's just not a futile thing. This can be done. And so thank you so, so much for sharing your time and your experiences with us. And policing is a wonderful, wonderful institution, career, life, and I think that you are case in point, evidence of that.

And I think you're right, we tell that story, that amazing story, because just listening to you for this time that we've had, if you didn't know about policing, you certainly know about it now and I hope that stories like yours intrigue others to join in.

O'Toole

43:14

Well, thank you very much. I really appreciate that.

Donelan

43:17

For our listeners, if they wanted to get in touch with you how would they do that?

O'Toole

43:20

I'll give you my email address if that's okay. I'm working with a great group of people at a company called 21CP Solutions. Chuck Ramsey was the one who launched the company. He was the former Police Chief in Washington, D.C. and the Commissioner in Philadelphia. Prior to that, he rose through the ranks of the Chicago PD and he served as President Obama's Chair of the Task Force on Policing. The name of the organization is 21CP, 21st Century Policing Solutions, but the email address is kathleen.otoole—O-T-O-O-L-E—at 2-1-C-P-solutions-dot-com. [kathleen.otoole@21cpsolutions.com]

Donelan

44:00

Well, Chief O'Toole, I cannot tell you, again, how much of a pleasure it was to hear your story and to hear your thoughts, and we will continue to watch you in awe, and we want to thank you for joining us here on *The Beat*.

O'Toole

44:11

Certainly, my pleasure. Thank you very much.

Donelan

44:13

And thank you for everyone for listening.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

44:15

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45:14

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