



Department of Justice

COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2015
WWW.JUSTICE.GOV

COPS OFFICE
(202) 514-5328

**COPS OFFICE DIRECTOR RONALD L. DAVIS DELIVERS A KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE
CNA EXECUTIVE SESSION ON POLICING IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

Remarks as prepared for delivery

In my almost 30 years of police work, I've witnessed a lot and seen a lot of changes. Like many of you in this room, I've seen firsthand communities decimated by crime and violence. I had to make the unthinkable knock on the door to tell a mother her child was shot and killed by gang violence and tell a wife and mother that her husband—a police officer—was shot and killed in the line of duty.

But I've also witnessed the true strength and resilience of a community and police department that work together to fight violence and take control of their neighborhoods. I can remember as a rookie in Oakland thinking how high tech my police department was because we had mobile digital terminals (MDTs) in our police cars. And, yes, a few of us—only after a credit check—were even issued pagers. Now, my 13-year-old daughter has enough technology to monitor the global economy.

I've seen the diversity of police departments throughout the country change and improve with regard to race, ethnicity, and gender; and I've seen our profession advance community policing over the past 20 years.

Let no one deny the progress we, as a profession, have made over the past two decades. But if we are being honest, we must also admit that despite these efforts some things have not changed, which has undermined our success.

New York Police Commissioner William Bratton captured it best during his swearing-in ceremony. Bill questioned why, with the historic reductions in crime and violence, New Yorkers were not celebrating their police. What Commissioner Bratton recognized is a lesson often forgotten the past two decades—a lesson best described by Jerome Skolnick when he stated, “order achieved through democratic policing is concerned not only with the ends of crime control but also the means used to achieve those ends.” In other words, the ends do not justify the means.

Sir Robert Peel, founder of the first modern-day police force in 1829, stated, “The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police actions.” This is not to suggest that the police condone illegal behavior. Nor does it suggest that policing strategies be based on public opinion. Sir Robert Peel also stated, “Police seek and preserve public favour not by catering to public opinion but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to the law.”

Peel's comments suggest that, in a democracy, the means of crime control are as important as the end. If the means (the how) are disparate and result in inequities, whether intentional or not, the police will lose their legitimacy despite the legality of the actions or the level of success achieved. Achieving statistical crime reduction provides little solace to communities, especially those of color, that feel more victimized by the means used to achieve the reductions than the actual crimes.

Police officers often struggle with this concept—not because they are insensitive to their communities. To the contrary, most officers want to serve their communities and make them safe. That is why they chose the profession. Officers struggle because the concept of legitimacy appears to defy logic: Why would a community that is adversely affected by crime and violence view legal police actions that successfully reduce crime and violence negatively?

The answer is simple—history. Our history of negative police and race relations has created generational mistrust of the police, especially in communities of color. Stories of police abuse are handed down generation to generation and validated by personal experiences, high-profile incidents, and some of our current systems.

For example, we still incarcerate more people than any other country in the industrialized world. And our incarceration rates are disparate when it comes to young men of color. Some police agencies still employ enforcement strategies that contribute to these incarceration disparities. And many agencies have yet to fully embrace community policing as their key operational philosophy; they consider it a program that is implemented when the COPS Office (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services) provides funding. As a result, the progress we have made is undermined by the unintended consequences of many outdated policies and practices.

We all know that the past year has been very difficult for law enforcement—with outrage over police shootings, demonstrations, criticism, and investigations. Whether or not the outrage and criticism are completely fair, they have sparked the birth of a new civil rights movement in this country—a movement that I believe will contribute to one of the most transformative moments in American policing history.

This new movement is focused on removing bias from our criminal justice system; ensuring all of our youth, especially our young men of color, have equal opportunity; and demanding changes in the criminal justice system to reduce the disparate impact of the system on communities of color. Now, these goals are in keeping with who we are as a profession and with our very oath of office.

In this respect, I truly believe the civil rights movement of today can and must be different from that of the past, especially with regard to the role of the police. In the past, the police enforced the discriminatory laws of the Jim Crow era. Today, police are often among the loudest voices demanding changes in laws and practices that result in disparate treatment of communities of color. In the past, the police were used to suppress free speech, demonstrations, and civil disobedience.

Today, we are working to employ strategies that protect First Amendment rights for everyone while ensuring the safety of the community and our officers. And the profession does not hesitate to identify when we fall short on these goals, and learn from our mistakes.

In the past, the voice of law enforcement was used to promote outdated and ineffective policies. Today, police leaders and unions have lent and should continue to lend their credible voice not only to

advocating for changes to policing but also to bring to the conscience of the nation the social conditions that contribute most to crime and violence.

Imagine the voice of the police chief who advocates for early education rather than an increase in incarceration. Or the chief who embraces prisoner re-entry not as the means to re-enter people back into prison, as I used to conceive of it, but as a way to keep them out of prison.

The loudest advocate for social justice in this new era and during this new movement must be the police. For we, more than any other group, understand public safety is not just the absence of crime; it is the presence of justice.

Last year, I had the privilege of serving as the Executive Director for the President's Task on 21st Century Policing. If you recall, President Obama convened this task force in response to numerous tragic events involving the police and communities of color. The president was clear in his charge: provide concrete recommendations that will aid law enforcement in building trust in the community while ensuring crime and violence continue on its downward trajectory.

For three months, 11 outstanding individuals from varied disciplines, perspectives, and experiences came together to listen to hundreds of experts, community, faith, and civil rights leaders—some of you in this room testified before this group. Despite their differences, the task force was able to build consensus on 59 recommendations with dozens of action items. This group learned how to agree, disagree, and agree to disagree without being disagreeable.

This is a lesson we all should embrace. For that is what is needed in our communities—the ability to build consensus and work together for a shared goal. I highly recommend reading the report. It's sure to open your eyes—and inspire you, too, with innovative ideas and practical strategies for more effective policing and productive community relations. You'll also find solutions to problems that have challenged us in areas from officer safety and wellness to implementing new technologies. In many ways, this report can serve as road map for law enforcement to work with the community and build trust.

To assist the field in implementing the task force recommendations, I am pleased to announce the formation of a new section within the COPS Office—the Policing Practices and Accountability Section. This formation of this new section was recommended by the task force, and it will work closely with all of you—practitioners and researchers—to provide technical assistance, identify industry best practices, provide crisis response services, and develop strategies to best implement the recommendations. As you can see, the COPS Office is committed to our motto, “Help the field to advance the field.”

Change is coming—it is inevitable. The real question is: what role should you play in this change? We are at a defining moment in our nation's history. All sides are coming together to acknowledge not only the prevalence of racism but also the role it plays in poverty and crime. This is no longer considered a partisan view or one that is embraced solely by the African-American community. And we must be in the forefront of this movement. This will require courage.

And you have courage. I'm certain most of you went into law enforcement to serve and protect. You run toward danger when others run from it. In fact, if there were gunshots outside here in the hall, most of you would get stuck in the door trying to get to the shots. If you heard an officer was down, you

would speed 125 miles an hour to the rescue—even if not in a squad car. You would place your life at risk without hesitation. Why? Because that is who you are.

We must now use that same courage and bravery in reforming our criminal justice system. Law enforcement does not have the luxury of waiting or avoiding tackling the herculean challenge of race and police. For many communities, the proverbial shots have been fired and there are young men down who need your assistance. Recent events have created a climate that is conducive to making necessary, positive changes.

So the real question is not if we respond but how. The best way to start is to promote community policing practices, which are based on fair and equal treatment of all members of the community. Encourage a return to the principles of Sir Robert Peel, which characterize police officers as “citizens in uniform,” policing with the consent of the people—who in turn must cooperate with the police to maintain public safety.

As law enforcement leaders, we should examine our municipalities’ or departments’ practices in relation to these principles—in training, recruiting, policing, and community relations, all areas. We also need to incorporate procedural justice into all of our internal practices and model the fair, unbiased treatment we want to see our police use in the community.

Equally important, we must embrace sentencing reform and work closely with prosecutors to find alternatives to incarceration. I realize that these recommendations present great challenges, but they also offer great opportunities. And you’re not going down this road alone. The U.S. Department of Justice stands by you. Our new Attorney General, Loretta Lynch, stressed this in her recent *Community Policing Tour*, noting that to heal the rifts that divide us we must work together.

Let me close by sharing with you a final thought and call to action from President Obama. Last year, the president launched the *My Brother’s Keeper* initiative. It’s an initiative designed to address persistent opportunity gaps and to tear down barriers that too often prevent boys and young men of color and other young people from realizing their potential. Named for a biblical reference, it is based on the moral call to become our brothers’ keepers, to look out for those who are in need, to share the wisdom and resources we have.

As you listen to the name of the initiative—*My Brother’s Keeper*—one group comes to mind. Law enforcement! For no other group in our society lives up to this name as you do. You are your brother’s keeper. You are your sister’s keeper. And you are this nation’s keeper! Please know that this administration truly appreciates your commitment, sacrifices and contributions to this great nation.

May God bless you and your families.

###

DO NOT REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, PLEASE USE THE CONTACTS IN THE MESSAGE OR CALL THE COPS OFFICE PRESS SECRETARY AT 202-514-5328.