

**Remarks by  
COPS Office Director Ronald L. Davis  
Release of the St. Louis County Police Department initial report  
“Collaborative Reform Initiative: An Assessment of the St. Louis County Police  
Department”**

**October 2, 2015**

*Remarks as prepared for delivery*

Good morning. Thank you for joining us on today’s call.

Before we get into the specific findings and recommendations of the report, I want to provide some background to explain how we got to this point.

In August of 2014, St. Louis County Police Department Chief John Belmar requested that our office – the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services – work with the police department through the Collaborative Reform process.

So, exactly what is the collaborative reform process? The COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative for Technical Assistance is a voluntary process that assists law enforcement agencies in strengthening and building mutual trust with the communities they serve.

It helps agencies develop long-term strategies for sustainable, positive change through community policing principles. It is a rigorous process that requires a comprehensive assessment of key operational areas within a police department to identify issues that affect public trust, agency effectiveness, and officer safety.

I applaud Chief Belmar’s leadership in making the decision to pursue collaborative reform. As you can imagine, it takes a certain level of courage and a high level of commitment to expose your agency to such a comprehensive review, especially knowing that any and all shortcomings identified will be made public.

But it is exactly this commitment to being open and transparent that should be applauded. We know the truth can hurt, but also know selective ignorance is fatal to an organization. In order to build and maintain trust between the police and community – a partnership critical to public safety – the police must always look for ways to better its service to the community.

We believe the COPS Office Collaborative Reform process is a way to achieve that goal.

The COPS Office’s technical assistance provider for this specific assessment, the Police Foundation, reviewed hundreds of departmental policies, manuals and training plans; conducted more than 200 interviews, focus groups and meetings with community members and police civilian and sworn staff; and directly observed police operations.

The report released today summarizes the findings of the assessment team and its recommendations to help improve the department's policies and procedures in specific areas.

The assessment focuses on a review of recruitment and hiring practices, training, handling of mass protests, traffic enforcement stops, use of force and community engagement.

Through its 50 findings, the report identifies policy, training and operational deficiencies in addition to a lack of trust between some sections of the community and the department.

Key findings include:

- There are deficiencies in the department's recruitment and hiring practices. This has resulted in the police department not representing the diversity of the population it serves. African Americans are significantly underrepresented in the ranks of officer and sergeant.
- The department provides insufficient training hours to community engagement, diversity and community policing during basic recruit and in-service training. Of the 916 hours of basic recruit training, only 14 hours – or 1.5 percent – are devoted to these topics. In addition, instructional staff is not sufficiently trained in these areas.
- The department does not invest sufficient resources in community engagement and problem solving, and does not allow enough opportunity for officers to meaningfully engage in community policing activities.
- With regard to use of force, the department does not thoroughly investigate the use of deadly force in all situations. The department only investigates the use of force in the event that the officer is a victim or the suspect is injured.
- We found significant statistical racial disparities in stops and searches that warrant further investigation by the department. Although the department's data collection efforts are compliant with state law, the data is inconsistently collected across the agency and does not allow for appropriate analysis of stop data. We strongly recommend the department do an additional, comprehensive analysis of its stop data to determine the causes of the racial disparities.
- The department has made improvements in its response to mass protests and demonstrations since last August, but does not have policies or training to ensure de-escalation options are exhausted before using tactical responses.

To address these issues, the report prescribes 109 recommendations to help the department improve with respect to industry best practices. These recommendations are consistent with the recommendations from the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing.

Over the next year and a half, the COPS Office will work with the St. Louis County Police Department to help implement these recommendations, provide technical assistance and other resources, and issue two subsequent progress reports.

It is now incumbent on the leadership of the police department to embrace the findings and recommendations in this report and lead the department to make the changes necessary to advance the St. Louis County Police Department and serve as a national model.

While we did identify deficiencies – areas we believe improvements should be made – I want to also highlight the fact that the men and women of the St. Louis County Police Department are dedicated professionals committed to serving their community. It would be fair to say that the St. Louis County Police Department is doing positive things in the community, and has a solid foundation upon which to build upon and expand those efforts.

For example, as part of another project, the COPS Office and Not In Our Town worked closely with the St. Louis County Police Department to create a documentary that we plan to release in the St. Louis area later this month regarding school resource officers.

The film – *Beyond the Badge: Profile of a School Resource Officer* – follows a St. Louis County school resource officer as he works to build relationships and mentors youth.

This filming took place in the aftermath of the shooting and protests that greatly impacted the St. Louis area. I believe this effort with the St. Louis County Police Department will help communities across the country identify the positive role school resource officers can play in improving relationships between students and law enforcement.

I also believe this report and the collaborative reform process will serve as a guide to the 61 police agencies in St. Louis County and a model for police departments facing similar challenges across the country.

We are joined on today's call by Blake Norton with the Police Foundation and Rick Braziel, a member of the Police Foundation assessment team.

On a side note, let me congratulate retired Chief Braziel for his recent gubernatorial appointment to the California Peace Officer Standards and Training Board – the body responsible for setting recruiting, hiring and training standards for the state of California.