

# THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON 21ST CENTURY POLICING

## **Minutes from the Listening Session on Officer Health and Safety**

**The Newseum  
555 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
February 23, 2015  
9:00 a.m. EST**

### **Attendance**

*Task Force Members:* Charles Ramsey, Laurie Robinson, Cedric L. Alexander, Jose Lopez, Tracey L. Meares, Brittany Packnett, Susan Lee Rahr, Sean Michael Smoot, Roberto Villaseñor

*Staff and Agency Personnel:* Ronald Davis, Darrel Stephens, Steven Rickman, Melanca Clark, Katherine McQuay, Charlotte Grzebien, Deborah Spence, Laurel Matthews, Silas Darden, Michael Franko, Jennifer Rosenberger, Shannon Long, James Copple, Colleen Copple, Jessica Drake, Jason Drake, Letitia Harmon, Steven Minson

### *Invited Witnesses:*

Laurence Miller, John Violanti, David Orr, Sandra Ramey, Alexander Eastman, Jane Castor, Jerry Demings, Craig Floyd, Yost Zakhary, Dianne Bernhard, Robert Bryant, Chuck Canterbury, Jonathan Thompson, William Johnson, Chuck Wexler, Karen Freeman-Wilson, Mark Magaw, Jim Pasco, Dustin Smith

### **Welcome and Opening Statements**

Ronald Davis, Executive Director of the task force and Director of the COPS Office, opened the listening session of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing at 9:00 a.m.

The co-chairs, Laurie Robinson and Charles Ramsey, each made welcoming statements noting the absence of Connie Rice and Bryan Stevenson due to travel.

They were followed by opening statements by each of the task force members in alphabetical order. Each introduced themselves for the audience.

Director Davis presented an overview of the agenda and thanked the staff who had organized the meeting before handing over to the co-chairs to introduce the first panel.

### **Panel One—Officer Wellness**

Each panelist gave a five-minute presentation and answered questions from task force members.

Laurence Miller talked about the stressors of work and personal life that police officers have to deal with and the necessity for counseling to be made available. Officers will be less likely to take out stresses on citizens if they feel supported by the commanders and if they understand how to deal with stress.

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John Violanti talked about the high rate of suicide among police officers and the need to change the culture. There should not be a perception that officers don't have problems. Police work itself does not lead to suicide, but paired with other stressors, it can.

Dr. David Orr talked about the high rate of PTSD in the police force. Officers with PTSD are a security risk. Other officers can help with PTSD care by volunteering after a traumatic event, but it should be acknowledged and treated.

[There were several technical difficulties with Sandra Ramey's Skype call. After a few minutes, the team was able to connect her to audio.]

Dr. Sandra Ramey talked about morbidity and heart rate. She conducted a study to monitor heart rate. Mean heart rates for police are alarmingly high, even during sleep. There should be training, healthcare, and counseling that bring down liability and health care costs.

### **Panel Two—Officer Safety**

Each panelist gave a five-minute presentation and answered questions from task force members.

Alexander Eastman talked about trauma-care training and the “downed officer kit,” which controls hemorrhage while waiting for medical help to arrive. It can also be used for citizens. He said injuries to law enforcement officers should be tracked and measured.

Jane Castor talked about the need for real-time information to officers from call centers, the necessity of developing community relationships to ensure office safety, and the importance of training to deal with the mentally ill.

Jerry Demings talked about how his department has reduced line-of-duty deaths significantly. He credits training, using real-life scenarios and the Below 100 campaign, which has encouraged officers to drive safely and buckle seat belts. He also mentioned the threat of the Sovereign Citizen group, whom he referred to as domestic terrorists.

Craig Floyd talked about positive initiatives Attorney General Eric Holder has taken to improve policing. He stressed the need for mandatory seat belt and vest wear. He said citizens also need to be educated about pull over and slow down laws.

*The task force adjourned for a lunch break and was called back to order at 1:00 p.m. EST by Ronald Davis.*

### **Panel Three—Voices From the Field**

Each panelist gave a five-minute presentation and answered questions from task force members.

Yost Zakhary spoke of law enforcement leaders and agencies ensuring officers have the proper equipment, training, and support and that keeping them both mentally and physically fit will make them better at their jobs.

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Dianne Bernhard talked about a nationwide effort to focus on the mental health of officers. She spoke about practical safety measures like vest wear and safe driving but emphasized the need to recreate policing as a noble profession in this country.

Robert Bryant talked about being a tribal law enforcement officer and the trauma that officers have to witness and sustain without receiving adequate care or counseling. He said tribal salaries should be competitive with other officers, they should have legitimacy as law enforcement officers, and they need to be adequately staffed, trained and resourced.

Chuck Canterbury spoke of the need to pass the Blue Alert Bill. He asked the task force to reaffirm a community oriented policing strategy.

J. Scott Thomson suggested that community oriented policing was the core principle that should govern an organization's culture. Militarization does not make communities safe. You must learn what matters to the community and transition from "hot spots" policing to "hot people." People measure safety by their lack of fear for their neighborhood, and heavy-handed enforcement after acts of violence revictimizes a community.

William Johnson said officers need to have due process rights. He emphasized the need for body armor and support for the family of a killed officer. He said if an officer's death is the result of PTSD, the family should receive benefits.

Jonathan Thompson talked about the role of law enforcement in the criminal justice system. He said we must reexamine the tools we use for this system and that we should be concerned about smart phone technology that allows officers to be tracked.

### **Panel Four—Labor and Management Relations**

Each panelist gave a five-minute presentation and answered questions from task force members.

Chuck Wexler spoke about PERF round tables concerning management and labor relations. He suggested management and labor find common ground, communicate openly, treat each other with respect, respect roles, and treat officers fairly.

Karen Freeman-Wilson talked about the need to have trust within the force and within the community. She agreed with Mr. Wexler's recommendations and suggested they be used not only within the police force but also between police and community.

Mark Magaw said leadership should treat officers the way they want officers to treat the community. He talked about the success his department has had in collaborating with every unit of every agency.

Jim Pasco emphasized the need for collective bargaining and said it improved relationships between leadership and officers. When a cop feels good about how he is treated, he will pass that along to the community.

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Dustin Smith spoke of the positive relationship he had with his chief and government officials because they had agreed not to tear each other down in the press and to communicate regularly. He mentioned officers who had been trained to be peer-support for post-trauma incidents.

### **Audience Participation**

During the open comment period, Executive Director Ronald Davis provided time for people in the audience to speak. Each speaker had two minutes, and comments were made by Aludipe Comfort and Michael Bell. Ms. Comfort spoke of her son who was killed by police and called for accountability. Mr. Bell spoke of his son who was killed by police. His family has used much of their own resources suing for justice.

There were no emails or Tweets read.

### **Concluding Remarks**

At the end of the audience comment period, each of the task force members took a few minutes to thank all the presenters and summarize what they were taking away from the day. They spoke in reverse alphabetical order, concluding with the co-chairs.

Executive Director Ronald Davis then thanked everyone for attending and noted that only one more panel remained and deliberations over the recommendations would begin the next day, February 24.

**The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:45 p.m. EST.**

Minutes Certified By Co-Chairs: 4/24/2015