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(202) 307-0703
www.ojp.gov

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE KAROL V. MASON
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL, OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS
BEFORE THE TASK FORCE ON 21ST CENTURY POLICING
WASHINGTON, DC**

Good morning. My name is Karol Mason, and I am the Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) in the United States Department of Justice (DOJ). I am very pleased to be here and grateful for the opportunity to talk to this committee about the work OJP and its partners are doing to support law enforcement in strengthening relationships with the communities they serve. I believe that building trust between citizens and police is one of the biggest public safety challenges we face in America today, and the President could not have chosen a more qualified, more respected group to take on this challenge.

I would like to take just a few minutes to tell you about some of the efforts under way in my office.

Last September, the Attorney General announced a major initiative being led by OJP in partnership with divisions across the Department of Justice, specifically the COPS Office, DOJ's Civil Rights Division, the Community Relations Service, and the Office on Violence Against Women. It's called the National Initiative on Building Community Trust and Justice, and its goal is to take what we know about procedural justice, implicit bias, and racial reconciliation and expand our base of knowledge about what works.

We are partnering with a renowned group of criminal justice experts from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Yale University, the Center for Policing Equity at UCLA, and the Urban Institute. These are the brightest minds in the field and they have a wealth of experience working with state and local police departments and communities on these issues. They have accumulated a vast knowledge of evidence-based models that they will test, refine, and expand in communities that are facing challenges stemming from suspicion and distrust.

The initiative will tackle a number of issues: It will address the strained relationships between minority communities and law enforcement; it will look to enhance the criminal and juvenile justice system response to youth; it will tackle responses to the concerns of the LGBTQ community; and it will aim to improve interactions between police and domestic violence and sexual assault victims. And we will keep a focus on victims because we know that people who reside in minority communities are victimized at higher rates, and the way law enforcement responds to a victim has an outsize impact on that victim's sense of justice and perceptions of fairness.

There are five major components of the initiative: first, we will select pilot sites to test strategies and provide training on procedural justice, implicit bias, and racial reconciliation; second, we will create a central information clearinghouse that will provide technical assistance to the field; third, we will support new research; fourth, we will develop materials to help carry that research into practice; and fifth, we will promote public discussion of issues around race and policing. We are already off and running. We are now considering candidates for the five pilots, and we will have those selected by the beginning of March. We expect the online clearinghouse to go live at about the same time.

One thing that is important to mention about the initiative is that we are approaching these issues from the perspective that trust-building is the responsibility of all parties. This is not only about what law enforcement can do to bridge the divide of trust; it's also about the civic obligation that communities have in engaging with police. And we will be emphasizing that point heavily during the course of our work.

This effort is part of the President's *My Brother's Keeper* Initiative. *My Brother's Keeper* is a partnership with private partners and local governments that is designed to help young people who are willing to work hard and play by the rules reach their full potential. It's about creating ladders of opportunity for our youth – and we know that many of the youth who need a boost live in minority communities where crime and disorder are prevalent. Building trust between law enforcement and communities is a key emphasis of the initiative.

We are also working closely with law enforcement agencies and associations to address the increasing demand for use of body-worn cameras. We have evidence indicating that body-worn cameras can help de-escalate potentially violent encounters. Preliminary research shows that departments that deploy cameras receive fewer public complaints. As part of his Community Policing Initiative, the President has proposed investing \$15 million to support the purchase and storage of body-worn cameras for state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. OJP will be responsible for administering that money.

Of course, there are a number of issues that must be addressed in deploying this equipment, from procurement and retention to training and privacy. To that end, our Bureau of Justice Assistance is planning to convene a two-day Body-Worn Camera Expert Panel in February. The goal is to develop a toolkit and website that address these issues and that can support our law enforcement partners as they deploy this equipment. We are also investing \$2 million through our Smart Policing Initiative to help local jurisdictions, in collaboration with a research partner, develop comprehensive plans and best practices for deploying body-worn cameras.

Equipment, particularly the use of military and military-style equipment, has been at the center of our discussions around race and policing. The President has been clear that the federal government must do a better job of standardizing procedures for transferring military-style equipment to law enforcement agencies. In the coming days, he will be issuing an executive order to create a federal working group aimed at improving the process for acquiring equipment that is appropriate to the needs of the community. We expect that the Attorney General will be asked to lead the group, and that it will have 120 days to issue recommendations to strengthen these transfer programs.

Along with strengthening law enforcement-community relationships, a twin challenge is sustaining the remarkable reductions in crime we've seen in recent years. Through our Byrne Justice Assistance Grants Program – which is the largest single source of federal

criminal justice funding – and other efforts like our Smart Policing Initiative, we are helping law enforcement agencies adopt evidence-based practices.

A newer effort, launched just last fall, is our Violence Reduction Network. This is an approach to violence reduction that leverages resources across DOJ in cities with violent crime rates above the national average. The current participating cities are Chicago; Detroit; Camden, New Jersey; Wilmington, Delaware; and Oakland and Richmond, California. The goal is to coordinate DOJ resources – from OJP, the COPS Office, and DOJ’s enforcement agencies – and focus them on the most pressing violence problems at each site, using data-driven methods to tackle those problems. The lessons we learn from these sites over the next two years will be replicated in other communities. The plan is to add five additional cities next year.

Finally, I know you will hear from my counterpart in the Department’s Civil Rights Division, Vanita Gupta, about the importance of diversity in our nation’s law enforcement departments. At OJP, we are working to help state and local agencies ensure that they have more diverse workforces. OJP’s Office for Civil Rights is responsible for ensuring that recipients of funds from OJP, the COPS Office, and the Office on Violence Against Women comply with federal laws that prohibit employment discrimination based on race, sex, and other protected classes.

For example, our Office for Civil Rights began conducting compliance reviews of state law enforcement agencies as part of a project to improve the recruitment, hiring, and retention of female troopers. And we enforce provisions of the Safe Streets Act that require grant recipients to analyze their workforces to determine whether they need to improve efforts to recruit and hire members of minority groups. We believe that a diverse police force is important to improving public safety, not to mention to ensuring credibility in the eyes of the public they serve.

As you can see, we are investing a great deal of our resources in strengthening law enforcement-community relationships, and I think that our work will go a long way toward improving police-citizen encounters and restoring confidence in our criminal justice system.

I want to thank you all for the work you are doing, and I am grateful for your time.

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