

Introduction

Trust between law enforcement agencies¹ and the people they protect and serve is essential to the stability of our communities, the integrity of our criminal justice system, and the safe and effective delivery of policing services.

In light of the recent events in America that have exposed rifts in the relationships between local police and the communities they protect and serve, on December 18, 2014, President Barack Obama signed an Executive Order establishing the *Task Force on 21st Century Policing*.

In establishing the task force, the President spoke of the distrust that exists between too many police departments and too many communities -- the sense that in a country where our basic principle is equality under the law, too many individuals, particularly young people of color, do not feel as if they are being treated fairly.

“When any part of the American family does not feel like it is being treated fairly, that’s a problem for all of us,” said the President. “It’s not just a problem for some. It’s not just a problem for a particular community or a particular demographic. It means that we are not as strong as a country as we can be. And when applied to the criminal justice system, it means we’re not as effective in fighting crime as we could be.”

These remarks underpin the philosophical foundation for the Task Force on 21st Century Policing: to build trust between citizens and their peace officers, so that all components of a community are invested in maintaining public safety in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Decades of research and practice tell us that the public cares as much about how police interact with them as they care about the outcomes that legal actions produce. People are more likely to obey the law when they believe those who are enforcing it have the right – the legitimate authority – to tell them what to do.² Building trust and legitimacy, therefore, is not just a policing issue. It involves all components of the criminal justice system and is inextricably bound to bedrock issues affecting the community such as poverty, education and public health.

The mission of the task force was to examine how to foster strong, collaborative relationships between local law enforcement and the communities they protect, and to make recommendations to the President on how policing practices can promote effective crime reduction while building public trust. The president selected members of the task force based on their ability to contribute to its mission because of their relevant perspective, experience or subject matter expertise in policing, law enforcement and community relations, civil rights and civil liberties.

The task force was given 90 days to conduct hearings, review the research and make recommendations to the President, so its focus was sharp, and necessarily limited. It concentrated on defining the cross-cutting issues affecting police/community interactions; questioning the contemporary relevance and truth about long-held assumptions about the nature and methods of

¹ Throughout this document “law enforcement” refers to all federal, tribal, state and local agencies of any size.

² Gold Emily and Melissa Bradley. “The Case for Procedural Justice: Fairness as a Crime Prevention Tool,” Community Policing Dispatch, Vol 6:9, September 2013. http://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/09-2013/fairness_as_a_crime_prevention_tool.asp

policing; and identifying the areas where research is needed to highlight examples of evidence-based policing practices compatible with present realities.

To fulfill this mission the task force convened six listening sessions to hear testimony, including recommendations for action, from government officials, law enforcement officers, academic experts, technical advisors, leaders from established nongovernmental organizations as well as grass-roots movements, and any other members of the public who wished to comment. The listening sessions were held in Washington D.C. January 13 and February 23; Cincinnati, Ohio January 30-31; Phoenix, Arizona February 13-14, and again in Washington, D.C. February 23-24. Other forms of outreach included a number of White House listening sessions to engage other constituencies, such as people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and members of the armed forces, as well as careful study of scholarly articles, research reports and written contributions from informed experts in various fields relevant to the task force's mission.

Each of the six public listening sessions addressed a specific aspect of policing and police/community relations, although cross-cutting issues and concerns made their appearance at every session. At the first session, **Building Trust & Legitimacy**, subject matter experts testified to the meaning of "community policing" in its historical and contemporary contexts, defining the difference between implicit bias and racial discrimination, two concepts at the heart of perceived difficulties between police and the people. Witnesses from community organizations stressed the need for more police involvement in community affairs as an essential component of their crime-fighting duties. Police officers gave the beat cop's perspective on protecting people who do not respect their authority, and three big-city mayors told of endemic budgetary obstacles to addressing policing challenges.

The session on **Policy & Oversight** again brought witnesses from diverse police forces – both chiefs and union representatives – from law and academia, and from established civil rights organizations and grass-root groups. They discussed Use of Force from the point of view of both research and policy and internal and external oversight; explained how they prepare for and handle mass demonstrations; and pondered culture and diversity in law enforcement. Witnesses filled the third session, on **Technology and Social Media**, with testimony on the use of body worn cameras and other technologies from the angles of research and legal considerations, as well as the intricacies of implementing new technologies in the face of privacy issues. They discussed the ever-expanding ubiquity of social media, and its power to work both for and against policing practice and public safety.

The **Community Policing and Crime Reduction** Listening Session considered current research on the effectiveness of community policing on bringing down crime, as well building up public trust. Task force members heard detailed descriptions of the methods chiefs in cities of varying sizes used to install effective community policing in their jurisdictions over a number of years. They also heard from a panel of young people about their encounters with the criminal justice system and the lasting effects of positive interactions with police through structured programs as well as individual relationships. A fifth listening session considered **Training and Education** in law enforcement over an officer's entire career, from recruitment, basic training, in-service training and the support, education and training of supervisors, leaders and managers. Finally, the panel on **Officer Safety and Wellness** considered the spectrum of mental and physical health issues faced by police officers, from the day-to-day stress of the job and its likely effect on an

officer's physical health, the need for mental health screening, to traffic accidents, burn-out, suicide, and how better to manage these issues to determine the length of an officer's career.

A Listening Session on the **Future of Community Policing** concluded the task force's public sessions, and was followed by the deliberations that led to the recommendations that follow on ways to research, improve, support and implement policies and procedures for effective policing in the 21st Century.

Many excellent and specific suggestions emerged from these listening sessions on all facets of policing in the 21st Century, but many questions arose as well. Paramount among them was how to bring unity of purpose and consensus on best practices to a nation with 18,000 separate law enforcement agencies and a strong history of a preference for local control of local issues. It became very clear that it was time for a comprehensive and multifaceted examination of all the interrelated parts of the criminal justice system, and a focused investigation into how poverty, lack of education and other social conditions cause or intersect with criminal behavior. We propose two overarching recommendations that will seek the answers to these questions.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: The President should support and provide funding for the creation of a National Crime and Justice Task Force to review and evaluate all components of the criminal justice system for the purpose of making recommendations to the country on comprehensive criminal justice reform.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: The President should promote programs that take a comprehensive and inclusive look at community-based initiatives that address the core issues of poverty, education, and safety.

The justice system alone cannot solve many of the underlying conditions that give rise to crime. It will be through partnerships across sectors and at every level of government that we will find the effective and legitimate long term solutions to ensuring public safety.