

Testimony of Chief Richard Beary President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police

Before the Task Force on 21st Century Policing
Listening Session: Building Trust & Legitimacy
January 13, 2015



Commissioner Ramsey, Professor Robinson, and members of the Task Force on 21st Century Policing, thank you for inviting me to testify today at the first listening session. My name is Richard Beary and I am the Chief of Police at the University of Central Florida and the President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). I have over 37 years of law enforcement experience, and I am here today to testify on behalf of the IACP.

The IACP is the world's largest association of law enforcement executives, with more than 22,000 members in 98 different countries. For over 120 years, the IACP has been launching internationally acclaimed programs, speaking out on behalf of law enforcement, conducting ground-breaking research, and providing exemplary programs and services to the law enforcement profession across the globe.

Over the past three decades, many communities throughout the United States have witnessed a remarkable decline in the rate of crime. America in 2015 is a far safer place than America in 1985. In fact, the most recent Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Report shows that incidence of violent crime in the United States fell to the lowest number since 1978. This is a testament to both the great work done by law enforcement and a shared commitment by community and political leaders to create and maintain safer communities.

Years of effective and targeted enforcement efforts by federal, state, and local agencies have transformed our neighborhoods from havens of fear to safer, more secure communities.

The law enforcement profession is better, more professionalized, and smarter about how we combat crime and protect our nation's streets, neighborhoods, and schools. We engage in partnerships with federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial public safety agencies, as well as the public and private sector, to confront daily threats to our communities.

We recognize that no single factor has been more crucial to reducing crime levels than the partnership between law enforcement agencies and the communities we serve. We know that in order to be truly effective, police agencies cannot operate alone; we must have the active support and assistance of citizens and communities.

Unfortunately, the future of this vital and successful partnership is at risk because of a rising level of outrage and rhetoric over issues surrounding police conduct and tactics that is driving a wedge between law enforcement officers and the citizens they are sworn to protect. Tragically, as a result, the heroic acts and great work being done on a daily basis by the law enforcement profession has been overshadowed by these few, high-profile incidents. What isn't talked about is that, for the most part, law enforcement officers have great relationships with their communities. They walk their beats, attend community meetings, check up on residents, implement evidence-based approaches, and always keep a watchful eye to make sure their community members are safe and well cared for.

What many don't realize is that the majority of contact law enforcement has with citizens is non-violent and non-controversial. The recent incidents that have been the center of focus are

not the norm. To put things into perspective, the average number of arrests per year is 12.5 million, which equates to about 34,000 per day. Of the millions of arrests police have each year, fatal encounters with law enforcement occur at a rate of far below 1%. While any death or injury is, of course, regrettable, these incidents are rare; especially when you consider that many of the individuals arrested are under the influence of drugs and alcohol; have anger management issues; suffer from mental illness; or simply choose to be combative.

It should also be noted that law enforcement is a particularly dangerous profession. Each year, there are more than 50,000 assaults on law enforcement officers which result in more than 14,000 officers being injured each year. This past year 126 officers were killed in the line of duty and violent ambush-style attacks on law enforcement officers increased. In 2014, 15 officers nationwide were killed in ambush assaults, matching 2012 for the highest total since 1995.

The root causes of tension between police officers and the communities they serve are as understandable as they are historic. Law enforcement officers occupy a unique position in a free society. They patrol the narrow line that separates freedom from lawlessness and even the most basic enforcement action taken by police officers can appear to infringe on the rights of others. The very nature of their duties ensures that law enforcement officers will be placed in the center of situations that are typified by stress and hostility. As a result, law enforcement officers are often the focal point for rage and confusion. If you add to this already volatile combination the perception that the officers may be acting in an unfair or inequitable fashion, it becomes clear why some members of the community view law enforcement officers with suspicion and contempt instead of with trust and respect.

The complexity of the community-police relationship is further intensified by host of other factors that police have no ability to impact. These include disparities in education; economic challenges; inequitable wealth distribution; and deficits in resource and service allocation.

Recognition and response of this complexity lies at the heart of building sustainable, trusting community-police relationships. However, the variation and individuality of the various groups that comprise a community demands that law enforcement employ a myriad of tools, strategies, protocols, and training to address the needs of each. It also requires that each community segment and the police join forces to create safe, peaceful neighborhoods in all communities.

A key strategy to overcome these challenges has been the adoption of a community policing philosophy by law enforcement agencies. Community policing strategies are designed to strengthen police legitimacy, while also controlling crime. These strategies address community problems in concert with the community, and position community members as force multipliers to the police department in keeping the community safe, and addressing community-defined issues.

A community that is engaged and feels heard by its police department is likely to be more supportive of its police department. That support can translate into the community providing

the resources necessary for police departments to do their job, which, in turn, contributes to the city's economic strength and viability. Indicators of strong relationships with the community include community members who provide critical information to the police during investigations, as well as those who are willing to testify in criminal cases when necessary.

However, despite the broad adoption of community policing over the last 30 years, police departments have been challenged to fully reach the promise of community policing as it was intended for a number of reasons.

First, resource shortages have made consistent, sustained community policing efforts difficult or impossible in many departments. Police departments continue to take on more responsibilities, making it difficult to recruit and retain the skills and resources necessary to address all issues facing individual communities. In addition, fully implementing community policing strategies often requires a greater commitment than traditional policing strategies and require a larger amount of personnel and resources. Unfortunately, community policing "duties" are often sacrificed when budget cuts or other resource deficiencies require reductions. These resource challenges contribute to inconsistencies in sustained community policing efforts.

Additionally, depleted resources in social/human service systems, and in law enforcement agencies, have forced police to take on more responsibilities and more complex work, and to do so with fewer resources. Police departments are not just responding to crime, overt violence, and disruption, but also to homeland security concerns, cybercrime, an exponential increase in non-criminal crisis calls, and more. These responsibilities take time and resources away from patrols and community policing duties.

Further, community demographics and changes in how communities operate make it difficult for many police departments to find ways to partner with unique segments. Many jurisdictions are experiencing increased diversity, becoming home to people of every nationality, culture, and religion; moreover, communities are also becoming less cohesive and more "loosely coupled," making it challenging for the police department to effectively engage. The fluidity of the changing community dynamic is a challenge for law enforcement.

Partnerships and engagement with certain segments is further complicated when those members have expressed interest in harming police officers. Law enforcement is not immune to fear, and when community members are vocal about wanting to act out in violence, it makes building those relationships a true challenge.

Finally, each community is unique and presents its own challenges. There will be no perfect one-size fits all model. Some relations with an entire community or just certain segments of a community may need strengthening, while other relationships are extremely solid.

While it is clear that progress has been made, there is always room for improvement and police departments can further strengthen their trust with communities, particularly those

communities that have felt mistreated or disenfranchised. Now is the time to re-evaluate, re-invigorate, renew, re-instate, rebuild, and restart departmental efforts to build meaningful community-police relationships. But, it is essential that we all recognize that no one group or system owns the problem, and that no one group or system will provide the entire solution. It is incumbent on all of us to work together to identify solutions and approaches that can be implemented by not just the law enforcement community, but the criminal justice system and the nation as a whole.

Realizing the necessity for action, the IACP took proactive steps to try to further enhance community-police relations, including holding a ***National Policy Summit on Community-Police Relations: Creating a Culture of Cohesion/Collaboration***. This summit brought together a wide range of law enforcement officials, community leaders, academic researchers, and policy experts from around the globe to discuss issues and concerns that shape and impact the relationship between police departments and the communities they serve.

Summit participants identified three overarching conceptual elements of strong community-police relations. They are communication, partnership, and trust. Summit participants identified a number of ways that law enforcement agencies can begin to mold a culture of trust and inclusion and improve community-police relationships.

This includes:

- Educating the community about police practices. If law enforcement is transparent with information and helps the community gain knowledge of what police are able to share, there will be a greater understanding of law enforcement's capabilities.
- Consistent communication with the community and internally within a department is key. This includes creating an environment that welcomes dissent and critical conversations.
- Partnerships and collaboration with the community are crucial element of a successful community-police relationship. Community engagement should occur beyond ancillary programs and could include a citizen advisory board, or another opportunity for the community to contribute in shaping the strategic planning process for the police department.

In addition, consistency should be established in efforts to build community-police relationships with a focus on sustained equity, justice, and constitutional policing.

These are just a few highlights from the summit report being released today and it is our hope that law enforcement will implement the recommended measures that are appropriate for their departments and communities. We are also hopeful that the Task Force will provide additional thoughtful recommendations for actions the community and others should take because establishing and maintaining a safe community requires an ongoing concerted effort

by all to work together. While much of the focus has been surrounded on what law enforcement should and can be doing, more also needs to be done by community residents and leaders, businesses, advocacy groups, media, politicians, and others.

These groups too must be willing participants and actively engage with their police department. This includes having thoughtful and meaningful discussions even when things are tense or difficult. This also means that leaders from the community, advocacy groups, and businesses should help police departments navigate the political terrain by being a vocal supporter of ideas or strategies that a chief and police department can employ to further community-police relations.

Finally, while we commend the Task Force members for their undertaking and look into community-police relations, it cannot stop there. For over 20 years, the IACP has called for the creation of a National Commission on Criminal Justice to develop across-the-board improvements to the criminal justice system, in order to address current challenges and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the *entire* criminal justice community. A deep dive into community-police relations is only one part of this puzzle. We must explore other aspects of the criminal justice system that need to be revamped and further contribute to today's challenges.

Again, thank you for convening this listening session and for the opportunity for the International Association of Chiefs of Police to express its views on the state of community-police relations in the United States and offer suggestions on ways to build sustainable community-police relations. I welcome any questions from Task Force members.