

Testimony

National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)

Before the President Barack H. Obama Task Force on 21st Century Policing

February 8, 2015

Co-Chairperson Charles H. Ramsey, Co-Chairperson Laurie O. Robinson, and members of the Task Force, I bring you greetings on behalf of the Executive Board and members of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives – NOBLE.

My name is Dwayne Crawford and I am the Executive Director of NOBLE. It is an honor for myself and NOBLE to provide written testimony on specific recommendations for the task force to consider in the area of Using Community Policing to Restore Trust.

NOBLE's testimony comes from the perspective of a Law Enforcement Organization that has been in existence for nearly 40 years. NOBLE has nearly 60 chapters and represents over 4,000 members worldwide that is comprised of chief executive officers and command-level law enforcement officials from federal, state, county, municipal law enforcement agencies, and criminal justice practitioners. NOBLE's mission is to ensure EQUITY IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE in the provision of public service to all communities, and to serve as the conscience of law enforcement by being committed to JUSTICE BY ACTION.

It is our position that this country has the unique opportunity through this task force to address the lack of trust and understanding of law enforcement by communities of color. It is imperative to every citizen that we collectively deploy solutions to ensure that America is secure both domestically and internationally.

Secondly, through these solutions, we are able to further the hopes and dreams of many of our forefathers in realizing true Civil Rights and Human Rights as stated in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The recent events in Ferguson, MO and in Staten Island, New York when combined with real and/or perceived attacks on civil rights legislation have created an environment where many people of color feel disenfranchised by their national and local governments. More importantly there is a pervasive belief (right or wrong) that the lives of minorities are of less value than that of their counterparts. How do we then respond in a manner that addresses a large segment of our communities?

Task Force Recommendation

It is our recommendation that the law enforcement community adopt community policing as the philosophy of policing in the U.S. and that it can be a critical tool in restoring trust.

Key components of Community Policing Implementation:

- Community policing if implemented correctly should allow officers to demonstrate their support for the community they have sworn to protect and serve. Residents and officers are allies.
- The police agency should mirror the racial composition of the community it serves. It is our recommendation that law enforcement enhance its recruitment methods. If a department's recruiting methods aren't resulting in a diverse force, they should form relationships with local and national private-sector organizations that are doing it well. There are numerous diverse hiring best practices.
- Training in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking are crucial to an officer's performance. You cannot be an effective or ethical officer if you cannot think critically-that is, being able to gather and process information to guide decision-making that directly affects behavior. Community policing demands that officers interact with people who live or work in neighborhoods that they patrol. Officers should be trained to communicate with people, solve community problems, and develop an appreciation of cultural and ethnic differences. Superiors should

continually evaluate their officers' command of these skills, much as they would the use of firearms, defensive tactics and knowledge of relevant laws and regulations, and continued refresher training should be provided when needed. If an officer consistently shows to be lacking in these areas, commanders should seriously consider terminating that officer.

- A trusting, collaborative relationship with the community requires police department transparency. Communities want to know that their concerns are being heard and addressed, and many communities are creating neighborhood advisory committees that provide direct feedback to police officials on the effect of police policies, programming, and messaging. Developing trust also means increasing the amount of time the police department and community - both in the form of groups and individuals on the street -- spend together. The more time together, the better each understands the other. Some options: regular community-based forums, department community advisory committees, activities for families in the local police department during the year, and a requirement that officers reside in the communities they serve. These activities need to be supported by the top brass, as the only way for this to work is through a top-down commitment.
- NOBLE recommends post incident updates occur shortly after occurrences. These updates should be in main stream media and social media. Dissemination should also include locations in communities that may not be 'main stream' such as barbershops, beauty shops, local stores and other gathering points.

- Lastly, it is imperative that through community policing the community is educated on both Law Literacy & Law Enforcement. NOBLE has launched a pilot program entitled “The Law and Your Community” through funding from the Department of Justice – COPS Agency. The program’s aim is to develop trust and understanding between law enforcement and the community. The Law & Your Community is an interactive training program for young people ages 13-18 designed to improve their communications with law enforcement officers and their understanding of their federal, state and local laws.

References

Dr. Lee P. Brown, (2014). Op-Ed: Our Nation Needs Community Policing

Dr. Cedric L. Alexander, (2014). Op-Ed: How To Build A More Sensitive Cop

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