

Testimony given to the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

Scott H. Decker, PhD. Foundation Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Arizona State University.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I appreciate the importance of your task and am hopeful that the Task Force will provide recommendations that can enhance public safety, improve law enforcement and more effectively integrate the public into crime control and public safety functions. This is the first national task force on policing since the Kerner Commission, was formed in 1967. Such a commission is long overdue and I urge the Commission to take a broad view of policing.

Why do people obey the law? In large part, people obey the law because they believe it to be a legitimate tool that is administered fairly that they are socialized to obey. Training enhances these beliefs by emphasizing the fair and regular application of the law.

Policing provides a public value, albeit a very expensive one. We train the police to enhance and expand this public value – the safety and security to conduct our daily lives.

There has been an unfortunate recent tendency in law enforcement to “circle the wagons”; it was palpable at IACP and can be seen in many police departments as officers and police leaders feel under siege. This is unfortunate because what we need at this time is just the opposite, more integration and interaction with the community. The recent example in Phoenix of Rev. Jarrett Maupin, a civil rights activist and long-time critic of the police is a case in point. Maupin underwent “use of force” training in which he participated in “Shoot/Don’t Shoot”

training. His attitudes about the police changed as a consequence of this training, documenting that outreach to the community – and integrating them into training opportunities such as citizen academies – can build trust in law enforcement.

Training. Training is the backbone of fair and effective policing. While academy training is at the core of creating officers who engage in fair and effective policing, in-service training provides a “booster” to those who are receptive and an important correction to those whose knowledge and skills may have weakened through time. In addition, in-service training enables law enforcement officers to keep up with a rapidly changing world of technology, people and circumstances. The public has a right to expect that law enforcement will produce consistent results and not be a patchwork of decisions with no common themes or practices. Such training also can save careers, by re-directing officers whose behavior has become problematic. In the five years I served on the Arizona POST, we reviewed nearly 1,000 cases of alleged officer misconduct. Most of those violations could have been prevented or corrected by the appropriate training, either one-on-one or in a group setting. There are three notable training activities around the country I would call your attention to. The first of these is the Supervisory Leadership Academy at the Center for Policing Excellence, Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST). This is exceptional training that emphasizes procedural justice, legitimacy and best practices. I believe you heard about this from Steve Winegar who runs that training. The second is the concept of “perishable skills” used by the California POST, which requires a 12 hour training module in communication skills every other year. Third, the recent effort by the Chicago Police Department to provide Procedural Justice Workshops for all officers is worth a closer look. What these three innovations have in common is a commitment to

enhance public trust in the police and expanding their legitimacy among individuals in our communities.

Training isn't value neutral; training announces and reinforces the values that underscore fair and effective policing. In this context, in-service training is especially important as it leads to patterns of behavior and expectations among law enforcement officers. Indeed, training reinforces the mutual bonds and expectations between the police and with the public.

In-service training prepares officers to respond effectively and safely to new circumstances as well as to existing problems. The language of 21st Century Policing is the language of legitimacy, procedural justice, evidence based interventions, collaboration and social media. The police need in-service training and basic training that prepares them for this language and the new knowledge generated weekly about fair and effective policing.

Diversity training is an essential component of 21st Century Policing. The world is dynamic and diverse and building empathy and understanding is a requirement of serving the public. The police are the government agency most likely to first see and be affected by these changes.

The challenges faced by law enforcement in the area of immigration are a good example of the need for in-service training to be dynamic. Dealing with new immigrants is an area where local policing hasn't been helped by the changing federal initiatives and lack of a clear and coherent federal policy. Between the rise and fall of 287G and Secure Communities, local law enforcement has been left largely to fend for itself. My colleagues at Arizona State and John Jay College and I recently completed two studies funded by the National Science Foundation in which we surveyed more than 200 chiefs in large cities, more than 100 in small cities and more

than 100 Sheriffs. Nearly half of the cities we surveyed have no clear policy regarding how to deal with undocumented. This means that police departments either develop ad hoc strategies for dealing with possible unauthorized immigrants, or leave decisions to the discretion of individual officers. Many key decisions about how police should deal with violations of immigration law take place on the street, during the day-to-day encounters between police and immigrants. This means that neither the national government, nor local elected officials, nor police executives have clear control over the enforcement activities now taking place. The patchwork that is immigration enforcement, in short, is made by individual officers on patrol with little or no guidance or oversight. In cities with no policy, there is no training on how to interact with immigrants. Even among cities in our survey that acknowledged the existence of local policy fewer than half provided training to their officers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Training should take place in cross-disciplinary settings. This should include line and supervisory personnel from probation, parole, prosecution, juvenile justice and correctional officers. Promoting a broader awareness of other aspects of the criminal justice system should be a goal of effective police training.
2. All members of a police department (line level officers, command staff, members of specialized units and civilian employees) should receive diversity training. The training should be revised and repeated regularly.
3. Training should integrate group experiences with classroom components. Going to the Holocaust museum, a Civil Rights museum, tutoring elementary school children, visiting a VA hospital and other activities should be integrated into police training.

4. There should be leadership and support for the development of training at the federal level. The COPS office is the right place for this to be housed.
5. Communication skills should be an integral part of all in-service and basic training. Training should emphasize the use of appropriate language in interacting with the public. The vocabulary of policing should not include the F or the N words.ⁱ
6. There is a dire need to evaluate the effectiveness of training both its content and method of delivery. This should be a solicitation at the National Institute of Justice.
7. Police basic and in-service training should integrate citizens wherever practical.
8. Both the substance and method of delivery are important for training. The use of web-based training, including the integration of video must be a fundamental part of training in the 21st century.
9. Police training must integrate and reinforce the principles of community policing.
10. The Commission should consider recommending that state level POSTs provide Continuing Education Units (CEUs) as is done in many professions including law and medicine.
11. Contemporary research on police has a lot to offer in crafting officer training. Partnerships between researchers and those who develop training should be encouraged and supported.