



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

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Statement

By

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The United States Conference of Mayors

Before the

Task Force on 21st Century Policing

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Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon. You are charged with developing recommendations that will be critical to the future of our cities and of our nation, and it is my honor to be with you today to provide some recommendations on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

I serve as chair of the Conference's Working Group of Mayors and Police Chiefs which developed a set of recommendations for improving police-community relations that we presented to all of the mayors and to your Co-chairs – Chuck Ramsey and Laurie Robinson – and to your Executive Director – Ron Davis – one month ago during the Conference's Winter Meeting here in Washington. Commissioner Ramsey, doing double duty once again, was also a member of our working group.

I believe you have all seen our report, in which our recommendations are grouped into six broad areas:

1. Building police-community trust,
2. Improving police department practices,
3. Ensuring timely and accurate communications,
4. Conducting independent investigations,
5. Addressing racial and economic disparities, and
6. Providing national leadership.

I would like to officially submit a copy of our report for the record of this listening session.

In some instances, our recommendations go beyond the purview of mayors and police chiefs and call for actions by the broader community in cities and in the nation as a whole, and by the federal government. This reflects our belief that

improving police/community relations is not solely a law enforcement responsibility. The entire community – business, the not-for-profit community, civic and social organizations, the faith community, police, and government at all levels – must be involved to assure not just public safety, but justice and, equally important, a sense of justice in the community.

The topic for this panel, labor-management relations, addresses a critical component of what we must be doing to build trust between the police and the communities they serve. While the leadership and direction must come from the mayor and police chief, it is primarily the actions of police officers on the streets, interacting with community residents on a daily basis and responding when an incident occurs, which will determine how successful we are in building and maintaining that trust.

First of all, let me register our agreement with the important principles that Chuck Wexler has articulated:

1. Focusing on finding common ground
2. Engaging in open communication and seeking input from one another
3. Handling disagreements with respect and professionalism
4. Understanding and respecting one other's roles and responsibilities, and
5. Recognizing the link between promoting officer safety and wellness and building strong police-community relationships.

I believe our role as mayors is to provide our police departments with the resources they need to get the job done. Those resources can be money or equipment, or something less tangible, such as creating an atmosphere that makes it easier for our officers to get the job done. We need to look at policing from various perspectives as we work to create a climate that allows the police to do their jobs. This includes the perspectives of the officers and their unions, the police department as a whole, the city government, and the justice system as a whole.

In Gary I use my convening power as mayor to involve the whole community. I address the big picture and work with our chief to relate it to law enforcement. I work closely with the chief and his command staff to improve policing practices of concern. We try to provide a consistent message, which is that the overwhelming majority of police officers are doing a great job. We make it clear that we support our officers and what they do, so long as they follow our established protocols. But we also make it clear that, when something appears to have been done wrong, we will investigate it and act on the findings of that investigation.

With every tragedy comes an opportunity, and what has happened in Ferguson and Staten Island and Cleveland and Brooklyn has to be seen as an opportunity for us all, and especially for America's mayors. We believe mayors are uniquely equipped to lead community conversations about the relationship between police and the community, and we believe these conversations must involve the whole community.

As mayors we have to embrace this opportunity to create a dialogue that will serve our cities for generations to come, a dialogue about race relations and poverty, and about how we in government will engage the community every day of the year – including those days when the police must be involved.

We hope you will find these thoughts and our recommendations helpful as you draft your report to the President and the nation. The Conference of Mayors stands ready to contribute to your important task in any way we can, and I stand ready today to answer any questions you might have. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you.