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Testimony

Building Community Policing in Richmond, CA

Richmond is an urban city of approximately 110,000 residents located 11 miles north of Oakland. It was the site of the original Kaiser WWII shipyards and is now home to one of the largest refineries on the west coast. It is a highly diverse community that is 40% Latino, 27% Black; 17% White; and 14% Asian. 20% of Richmond residents live below the poverty level and the unemployment rate is 17%.

Richmond has struggled with historically high rates of crime and has often been among the nation's most violent cities, even when crime has decreased nationally. In 2004, Richmond had 8,168 Part I crimes. In 2007, the city sustained 47 murders, most of which involved firearms and occurred in public places. Public safety and a longstanding distrust of the police, have been top concerns of residents for many years.

In response to these concerns, the Richmond community committed to addressing violent crime as a public health crisis. City leaders recognized the need to influence individual and community behavioral factors in the etiology and prevention of violence. Like most public safety agencies a number of years ago (and even now), Richmond PD believed it was practicing "community policing", although *quality* relationships between

most residents (especially residents of color) and police officers were largely non-existent or strained at best. Community policing was synonymous with “public relations” and a small, select group of officers did the majority of the department’s community outreach.

Since 2006, the department has made a number of changes to address these issues and build a more effective partnership with residents. These changes have not come easily or quickly because they have involved transforming culture within the police department, as well as in the community. Culture change takes time. It requires adaptive, not just technical leadership, and it’s built around relationships and trust. It also requires an engaged top management team working together with shared goals, committed to achieving the same mission, that encourages cops and professional employees to achieve superior outcomes.

There have been multiple components involved in this change process, all which continue to require hard work, creativity, and commitment. Here are a few examples:

1. Assuring **all** officers, not just a select few, are doing community policing and neighborhood problem-solving. Every officer is expected to get to know the residents, businesses, community groups, churches, and schools on their beat. Cops are expected to work with these folks to identify and address public-safety challenges, including quality of life issues such as blight. Officers remain in the same beat or district for several years or more—which builds familiarity and trust.
2. Hiring, training, evaluating, and promoting officers based on their ability and track-record in community engagement, not just traditional measures of policing, such as arrests, tickets, or tactical skills. The department has hired a highly diverse group of

officers (60% non-white), many who are from Richmond. They have backgrounds that include social work, volunteerism, civic involvement, and wide-ranging life experiences. Officers receive training in communication skills, dealing with the mentally ill, community resources, crisis intervention, crime prevention, diversity, and Fair & Impartial policing. Officers receive feedback that specifically evaluates their beat projects, connections with residents, and community policing skills. To be promoted, officers are required to study and test successfully on materials that focus on evolving police-community issues, best practices in crime-fighting, partnering with diverse communities, and more. Officers desiring advancement have to do more than “talk the talk”; they need to have “walked the walk”—which includes having established credibility within their beats.

3. Insisting that public safety is a shared responsibility that requires a **partnership** between residents and police—rather than finger-pointing or sitting back and waiting for others to do the heavy-lifting. A few examples of innovative police-community partnerships in Richmond include:
 - An active and effective *Ceasefire* program that has helped reduce murders in the city to the lowest level in 30 years. Detectives meet regularly with representatives from faith-based and other groups to coordinate call-ins or home visits of individuals identified as being at high risk to commit shootings.
 - RPD is a lead partner in the *West County Family Justice Center*, a collaboration of service providers and advocacy groups providing a “one-stop

shop” of services for victims of domestic or sexual violence with a special focus on meeting the needs of underserved residents, including youth.

- The department has a nationally-recognized Daytime Curfew Program that involves officers picking up truant youth, conducting a detailed assessment of why they’re not in school, and working with community partners to address these issues. Recidivism rates have consistently been 10% or less.
- Police participation in such diverse community activities as urban greening programs; park-building initiatives; ongoing “*Coffee with a Cop*” gatherings at various neighborhood businesses; youth programs that involve cops mentoring kids in a high-crime multi-family housing complexes; an annual Foster Care Youth Summit developed by RPD personnel attended by several hundred foster families; “*Unity in the Community*”—a series of meetings at schools in a predominately Latino neighborhood focused on policing issues identified by residents; are just a few of these initiatives.

Common threads woven throughout all of these changes have included a commitment to **accountability** (e.g., a more accessible/rigorous complaint process, follow-through on commitments and projects, etc.), **approachability** (e.g., getting cops out of cars, engaged at community events, being friendly, and recognizing the importance of demonstrating empathy), as well as **transparency** (e.g., providing access to the media, advocacy groups, and others to policy development, crime-fighting strategies, etc.).

At the end of 2014, Richmond had recorded a record low 5,115 Part I crimes, including 11 murders (a 30+year low). It cannot be overstated that this was not a result of any single quick or easy solution—nor are we declaring “Mission Accomplished”. We’ve had multiple challenges in Richmond, including limited personnel, tough labor issues, lengthy litigation, and a history of complex racial, political, and financial obstacles. All that said, if Richmond “can do it” (in the vernacular of *Rosie the Riveter*—a Richmond icon!) and achieve the outcomes we’ve gotten, we believe other cities can utilize similar strategies to build successful police-community partnerships.



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