

The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

Public Listening Session: *Building Trust & Legitimacy*

Public Testimony prepared for Mayor Michael A. Nutter, Mayor, City of Philadelphia

Tuesday, January 13, 2015

Good afternoon to the Task Force co-chairs, Police Commissioner Ramsey and Professor Robinson, members of the Task Force and my fellow panelists, Mayors Johnson, Landrieu and Rawlings-Blake. It is an honor to testify before this task force on an issue of utmost concern and importance in America today: strengthening public trust and building strong relationships between local law enforcement and the communities they protect while also promoting crime reduction.

I have been Mayor of Philadelphia, my hometown, for more than seven years. In that time, my Administration has accomplished many things on behalf of and working with our citizens. I am proud of every step we have taken to improve the quality of life in our great city, but none more so than what we have done to increase the feeling of public safety on our streets by creating an environment of shared trust and values between police officers and residents.

I can't talk about our public safety strategy without talking about the approach I took to governing when I became Mayor in 2008. I came into office knowing that public safety would be the number one issue I needed to address because without it, none of my other goals – job creation, increased graduation rates, growing our population, attracting businesses – would be possible. I took this approach not only because ensuring public safety is one of the primary functions of a municipal government, but because my sixteen years serving on City Council reinforced for me the notion that no city can be great without mutual respect between government and citizens.

One of my first Administration appointments – save hiring a Director of Finance to put our City on fiscally solid ground – was our great Police Commissioner, Charles Ramsey. When I was searching for a Police Commissioner I looked at many candidates from across the country

knowing that I needed someone who shared my values and vision for a safer, smarter police force and city. The entire public safety team that was assembled, including Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Chief of Staff Everett Gillison, Director of Public Safety Michael Resnick, Commissioner Ramsey and his Deputy Commissioners, has worked together for the last seven years to make this vision a reality. My emphasis on public safety as the number one priority is also why I declared a crime emergency in Philadelphia during my inaugural address, and why I asked Commissioner Ramsey to come up with a plan to increase safety on our streets within 30 days of that declaration. The Commissioner's plan has grown and evolved into a strategy that has reshaped how the job of policing is approached by our men and women in uniform and has ultimately made Philadelphia safer than it was.

Of course, 'safe' is a relative term – especially if you are a resident who heard gunfire outside their home last night – which means that our work will never be done. Furthermore, with 248 homicides in the city last year, we still have a long way to go. However, this number represents a 36% decrease in homicides since 2007, the year before we began our holistic approach to crime prevention, and in that time period we've also seen a dramatic reduction in shootings and all violent crime. It is because of these measurable statistics that I believe the City of Philadelphia has developed an effective, and more importantly, replicable approach to policing and community engagement – an approach which I will briefly share with you today, as well as my observations as a Mayor about what more can be done.

I grew up at 55th & Larchwood Avenue in West Philadelphia at a time when there was a great level of mistrust and tension between the Police Department and the communities which they were sworn to serve and protect – especially the black community. As a member of that community, when I became Mayor I knew in my heart that any cooperation or partnership between citizens and the police needed to be born out of an understanding of that history but with an emphasis moving forward.

We developed Philadelphia's version of a community policing strategy, which began with an examination of what 'good policing' meant to us. The police could not be seen as an occupying force, they could not ostracize or treat with contempt, and they could not whizz by in vehicles allowing for little or no interaction with residents. This type of hands-off policing did nothing to foster personal relationships or trust between police and citizens – both of which are crucial

elements to protecting lives and solving crimes. We wanted to bring about a universal understanding that as much as citizens rely on police to keep them safe, police rely on citizens for the information they need to do their jobs. There needed to be an end to 'us vs. them'. As a government, our belief in working with the community led to listening to residents about their desires for their neighborhoods, which led us to our community policing strategy.

To build public trust in the integrity and professionalism of our police officers, we focused on the training officers received and our Administration's communication with those officers. Training officers to engage respectfully with citizens creates confidence in both groups and goes further in producing a safe environment than any technology or equipment ever could. And just as important as good rapport between officers and citizens, we also needed trust and understanding between Administration leadership and rank-and-file officers. We found a partner in this effort in Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 5 President John McNesby. Acknowledging the difficult balancing act officers must perform when they go to work – the fine line they walk between being respectful and taking precautions to protect themselves – conveyed our Administration's deep respect and admiration for the risk these men and women take every day when they put on their uniform, and at the same time, demonstrated our absolute intolerance for abusive, corrupt or illegal behavior from officers. Even in difficult economic and socially turbulent times, we have kept the lines of communication open with union leaders and our police force is stronger and more resilient for it.

Out of this new approach to training and leading our officers came inspiration to develop a new program, which was piloted with a group of young, technology-savvy officers dubbed 'Listen First'. These officers went into the community they served not just when they were performing traditional law enforcement duties, but also to ask residents about neighborhood issues that remained unaddressed and if they could help the residents resolve them. The officers took pride in how they helped neighbors fix small issues like broken street lights, potholes and blighted lots, and residents began to see the officers as people who could help them create positive change – not just as uniforms that appeared when terrible events occurred.

This concept is not revolutionary, in fact, this is the way policing was done for many years decades ago. Somewhere along the way in American history, local police forces became almost

militarized in their missions and operations and the distance – both literal and figurative – between officers and citizens grew.

In Philadelphia, we saw a different way and wanted the best of both worlds: the old way of community-engaged policing could be married with modern uses of technology and metrics to measure success. Commissioner Ramsey reinstated foot patrols for all rookie officers and at the same time, we implemented GIS systems and used data to make decisions about staffing assignments. We created an entirely new, holistic approach to reducing crime with partners at every stage of the criminal justice process, including the District Attorney, the courts, the prison and parole system, and even the community development corporations and neighborhood townwatch organizations. This led to new City initiatives:

- PhillyRising, a community-engagement entity that reduces crime in the most dangerous neighborhoods in our city by providing residents with education about how to access City services,
- GunStat, a metrics-based partnership with the D.A.'s office to target the most dangerous offenders,
- and the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership and CeaseFire, both of which bring together citizens who have made mistakes and served their time with at-risk youth to hopefully intervene and put them on the right path.

With these new programs in place, we have continued to listen to the voices of our citizens and we have continued to learn from what the facts tell us. We know that the overwhelming majority of homicide victims and perpetrators in our city are young, black men, so I partnered with New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu to form Cities United, which seeks to address this disparity and improve opportunities for young men of color – very similarly to President Obama's 'My Brother's Keeper' initiative, which I am proud to support and have already hosted a workshop for in Philadelphia. We have also formed a Youth Violence Prevention Collaborative, assisted by a grant and support from the United States Department of Justice, which partners the police, the courts, and social service agencies to review the entire youth justice system in Philadelphia and to institute changes to keep youth from falling into the devastating and hard-to-escape criminal justice cycle.

If I have learned anything as Mayor about how to ensure public safety in a large and diverse city like Philadelphia, it is that nothing can be accomplished without mutual respect and a sense of shared destiny – the idea that we are all in this together. I believe that this is how we will move forward as Nation into the world of 21st century policing under the leadership of President Obama and this Task Force. Thank you.