

### **Role of police in a democratic society:**

The role of police in a democratic society is to serve and protect communities with the concerns of the community being a primary objective. In order for policing to truly reflect democratic values, community involvement in the decision making process on how to police the communities is essential.

### **Hiring a diverse workforce:**

A diverse workforce is unarguably an important aspect in the field of policing. It promotes a level of understanding and compassion that is crucial in a nation with an ever increasing diverse population. We can look at the city of Ferguson, Missouri as an extreme example of the failure of diversity; the racial demographic there is 67% African-American, yet African-Americans make up even less than 6% of the entire police force. This disproportion will certainly foster a deep level of misunderstanding in which innocuous actions can be perceived as threatening. However, the effectiveness of diversifying police departments in order to in strengthen department/ community relations can be seriously undermined by policies which force officers to aggressively enforce minor infractions, disproportionately targeting certain groups. However, we need more than diversity in police departments. It is too easy to put in minorities at the bottom or in select positions at or near the top. For instance, in the NYPD only 6.7% of Blacks are in the discretionary executive ranks; 10% are Hispanic; and 82% are White. Of those Blacks and Hispanics, they are typically in the senior "figure head" positions such as Chief of Community Affairs, First Deputy Commissioner, Chief of Housing. Key positions like Chief of Department, Deputy Commissioner of Operations and Chief of Detectives are typically held by White men. Meanwhile Blacks and Hispanics make up about 45% of line officers. So, diversity is not enough. ***We need minorities also in key positions with real power and influence within the police organizations.***

As seen in New York City, the "Broken Windows Theory," coupled with zero-tolerance policing, has led to mass incarceration of people of color for minor nonviolent offenses. Such policies strip away an officer's discretion and instead promote enforcement which incentivizes police conduct that is detrimental to good community relations. Minority officers are not immune to the cultural norms that unfortunately exist in police departments throughout the nation; they too are susceptible to the stereotypical belief that black males are predisposed to criminality.<sup>1</sup> Such a belief serves as a false justification for over-aggressive policing in certain neighborhoods, perpetuating the mistrust of the police in these neighborhoods. In addition, the "Broken Windows", "zero tolerance" or Stop, Question and Frisk are all symptomatic strategies of a police force that do not address the deeper institutionalized police processes that breathe life into these strategies that perpetuate taking an "as is" approach. Serious attention must be given to Performance Evaluation systems within a Police Department; Department and

nonofficial reward systems within a Police Department; data-driven performance management systems that have made policing a business reduced to quantifying all police citizen contacts that are deemed relevant, and any other systems that limit officers' discretion, dehumanize police citizen contacts; reward cops for good arrests but not for good problem solving; permitting cops to get overtime, a good detail; good performance evaluation; or a promotion. All these "systems" are one of the biggest challenges modern policing faces to promote real and meaningful change.

### **Procedural Justice & Police Leadership development:**

Multiple studies have been conducted that empirically support the unfortunate fact that blacks and Latinos, particularly males, are perceived as dangerous criminals even when there is an absence of any wrongdoing. These sometimes subconscious beliefs are rooted in the blatantly racist past of our nation. Most Americans are unaware of how this gruesome past has shaped not only subconscious biased views but also the structure and culture of many of our nation's institutions-- in this case police force policies. ***I am fully convinced that the inclusion of Critical Race Theory in academy level training and at least bi-annually presented as a refresher will enlighten officers, resulting in a more competent police force.*** Currently, what is provided to police recruits at the academy level is an education in multiculturalism which simply attempts to celebrate diversity by teaching recruits about different holidays, customs, cuisines, and contributions of varied groups to civilization. This sadly does little, if anything, in erasing subconscious biases.

The main principles of Critical Race Theory bring awareness to how white privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racism currently affect our society today. One of our nation's foremost academic institutions in the field of police education, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York already provides such a course to NYPD members who are continuing their education. I have spoken to friends who are officers who told me that this course not only helped them learn the racial connection to policing in the United States, but also that it has helped them make better decisions on patrol, resulting in community satisfaction without sacrificing public safety. Sadly, with only less than 150 officers taking this course annually, the benefit from this knowledge will not make a dent in a department with over 30,000 members.

Ultimately, aggressive enforcement and poor community ties result in a severe blow to procedural justice. Rather than perceive the system as fair, people in certain communities feel it does not serve them, rather actually victimizes them. ***Changes must be made to current policies which have resulted in harsher sentencing for infractions by minorities who have been disproportionately arrested for the same infractions committed by their white counterparts.*** This is an important step towards procedural justice. As the nation has recently witnessed in

highly publicized cases of police brutality, the lack of accountability by local prosecutors further deteriorates the principles of procedural justice. In addition, transparency in the grand jury process is needed in order to prevent possible bias in favor of officers involved in cases of brutality. Making the process somewhat more transparent to the public will assure those skeptical of the system that it is done in fairness, strengthening procedural justice.

In New York, a stop-and-frisk policy, which was believed to deter individuals from carrying weapons, knowing that they could be stopped at any time if the police deemed the individuals as “suspicious.” This aggressive policing policy, however, was disproportionately pursued in minority communities, and a great majority of the stop and frisk victims were black and Hispanic. Judge Shira Scheindlin a federal judge sitting in the United State Southern District Court recognized this violation of civil rights of these groups and demanded an end to this policy and recommended the creation of an independent inspector. The New York City Council created the Office of Inspector General as part of the Department of Investigation with the Inspector General being appointed by the mayor. He or she has the responsibility of investigating and reviewing the policies and programs of the NYPD, and makes recommendations with the goal of protecting civil liberties and civil rights. ***More cities should create this position as a method to increase the community’s confidence in the fairness of the policies pursued by the police department.***

#### **Community engagement and dialogue:**

***Our police departments must include community residents at the table discussing how minority communities can be optimally policed.*** Currently, the relationship many departments have with community members who voice concerns with department policies is comparable to that of a parent refusing to consider a child’s demands with the belief that the parent knows best. There is an ill-founded notion that we the people from the minority community want a lawless society. This notion is not only untrue, but even insulting to many of us. We understand the importance of law enforcement officials and the crucial role that they play in protecting those who are most vulnerable and that they must also protect themselves while attempting to protect those they serve. Community members do want to work with the police to ensure that our streets are safer and pleasant. We are simply asking that this is done the right way. Of course, this is not to say that it will be perfect--it will never be, and we are fully aware of this. However, one should never accept that public safety and innocent people’s rights and their dignity are mutually exclusive.

### **Improving police and youth relations:**

Many youngsters only encounter officers when they get into trouble. Having officers (not simply those assigned to community units) involved in regular community activities that include youngsters is crucial to positively changing that reality. Police officers should be present to celebrate the positive accomplishments of youths in the community--at community events, graduations, sports events, etc. Although, I have had those personal encounters with law enforcement officials, I purposely interviewed fifty adolescents on this particular issue. According to these youth this relationship can drastically improve if police officers are more respectful and less aggressive towards them. Their overall sentiment is that police officers mistreat them and the officer's tone and their manners disrespect the youth and are inflammatory. Just as officers need training in cultural differences, they must receive training specifically on how to deal with youth--the same way pediatricians are trained differently from general practitioners.

Departments throughout the nation must understand that adolescents have different perspectives and are not always aware of consequences. As a young man of color who grew up, and still resides, in an urban environment that is heavily policed, I have personally experienced many of the issues which I have discussed in this testimony. Public service was an obligation I felt I had; as a child I thought becoming a police officer would allow me to fulfill such an obligation. Unfortunately, the senseless and unjustifiable killing of Sean Bell in 2006, an unarmed black man, on the night before his wedding, and countless personal negative encounters with law enforcement officials as a teenager changed my perception. However, I have also had many positive encounters with police officers that now have compelled me to appreciate the profession and its difficult demands—as well as friendships with officers who truly serve and protect with respect and dignity.

### **Role of police unions (and line officers) in building trust:**

Currently, municipal police unions are the fastest- growing and perhaps the most powerful labor unions in America today. These unions face a distinct conflict of interest; they are responsible for protecting their members' interests at the expense of the public's interest. Police unions are obligated to protect officers from the same laws that they have a duty to enforce. They attempt to shield their members from wrongdoings that is their job to hold the public accountable for. As one can imagine, such a notion does not sit well with the public; it creates a deep-level of distrust and sense of hypocrisy within the community.

Police unions do have a legitimate purpose; no one wants officers to be recruited on the basis of favoritism or nepotism. However, no one wants the unions to use their power to abuse the rights of individuals in the community. ***A good counterforce to help protect police unions from***

***exerting their influence in a way harmful to the community is the existence of civilian complaint boards, and these boards must have real power.*** In New York City these boards have been in existence a long time.

**Racial Reconciliation:**

Reconciliation of races is a much larger concept than just the police vs. the communities they serve. A beginning to this reconciliation I believe is an in depth awareness of the history of the racism that has existed in the United States, and this has to be more clearly delineated in our schools' curriculums. In essence, all the recommendations I have made in the preceding pages are setting our country on the path toward this reconciliation. This is a goal that we all aspire to, but recognize that it will take a great effort to achieve: Hopefully implementation of these recommendations will lead us forward to these goals.