

**Testimony**  
**National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)**  
**Before the President Barack H. Obama Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing**  
**February 18, 2015**

Co-Chairperson Charles H. Ramsey, Co-Chairperson Laurie O. Robinson, and members of the Task Force, we bring you greetings on behalf of the Executive Board and members of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives – NOBLE.

It is an honor for NOBLE to provide written testimony on specific recommendations for the task force to consider in the following areas:

- Reducing Officer Deaths
  - Shootings
  - Suicide
  - Vehicle operations
- Stress Management (PTSD)
- Physical Fitness
- Training and Safety Equipment
- Internal Procedural Justice
  - Treatment of officers
  - Fair discipline process
- Labor / Management Partnerships

NOBLE's testimony comes from the perspective of a Law Enforcement Organization that has been in existence for nearly 40 years. NOBLE has nearly 60 chapters and represents over 4,000 members worldwide that is comprised of chief executive officers and command-level law enforcement officials from federal, state, county, municipal law enforcement agencies, and criminal justice practitioners. NOBLE's mission is to ensure EQUITY IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE in the provision of public service to all communities, and to serve as the conscience of law enforcement by being committed to JUSTICE BY ACTION.

## **Task Force Recommendations**

### **Reducing Officer Deaths – Shootings, Suicide, Vehicle Operations**

The proliferation of illegal firearms throughout America, arguably, is the dominant external stable impacting the safety of Police Officers. However, attempts to reduce that threat to officers causes spasmodic emotions and bitter constitutional diatribe themed as attacks on ones' "Right to Bear Arms".

The December 20, 2014 assassination of New York City Police Department Detectives Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos, calamitously, is an apropos remnant of the nations' broken and fragmented firearm sale and possession policies. Where "straw buyers", without hindrance, populate urban cities with deadly weapons; and where firearm possession is a presumptive right, rebutted only upon a felonious act that merit law enforcement intervention.

An equally troubling scourge that causes pain and devastation to the law enforcement community is the demise of law enforcement officers as a result of suicide. Each year more law enforcement officers commit suicide than killed by criminals and, a multitudinous of co-workers struggling to contemplate at-risk behavior signs missed that could have forebode the tragic consequences. Oftentimes, alcoholism, financial stress, martial or relationship discord is a contributing culprit. However, a well trained professional law enforcement agency will also factor in the cumulative stress of police work when attempting to understand causality.

While stringent firearm laws and robust suicide prevention measures are no panacea, its embracive components add to the wellness of law enforcement officers. In other words, we have an obligation to ensure we are deploying law enforcement officers who have a sense of safety and security in their work environment and are mentally supported to effectuate professional police services.

### **Recommendations – Shootings**

In light of tenacious opposition, NOBLE recommends commonsense measures such as, limiting the quantity of hand guns purchased and within certain time periods; requiring the reporting of lost or stolen handguns within 24 hours; judicial approval for persons with a history of domestic violence and a presumptive prohibition of mental health patients, absent a medical doctor endorsement.

Additional recommendations are listed below:

- Training and exposure to tactical/predictive policing strategies and methodology.

- Enhanced RMS and 9-1-1 systems integration with DMV, probation departments, BOLO files, call history information, NCIC, etc.
- Training on scenarios to determine individual and force multiplier strategies before engagement.
- Collaborative call dispatching/notification strategies in high crime and rural areas where there are overlaps in multi-jurisdictional areas.
- Forensic/tactical crime scene reconstruction in officer involved shootings and officer involved assaults to enhance knowledge of best practices for shoot-don't-shoot situations and less than lethal force applications.
- More intensive surveillance and probationary oversight on past offenders with high propensity for violence and assault.
- Additional training and review on procedures associated with domestic violence calls.
- Research and development in the areas of protective body armor for additional flexibility and projectile stopping power.

### **Recommendations – Suicide**

NOBLE provides the following recommendations:

- On-going officer awareness training to assist in the identification of at-risk officers.
- Quality readily available health professionals with a trustworthy and confidential referral network.
- Mandatory behavioral assessments performed every 3 to 5 years. Additional assessments are recommended in high stress assignments such as SWAT, Narcotics, Sex and Youth Crime, etc.
- Family oriented seminars to provide information on stress indicators on law enforcement families and possible coping strategies such as stress relieving techniques.
- Work load re-assessment to include overtime and extra duty job hours.

### **Recommendations – Vehicle Operations**

NOBLE provides the following recommendations:

- Additional training in defensive driving (incidental and non-incident to accident involvement).
- Additional training and department adoption of chase policies and emergency response procedures.
- GPS speed tracking indicators in patrol cars and integrated with 9-1-1 dispatch centers.
- Public hotlines to report erratic and unprofessional driving.

- Re-assessment of seat belt restrain systems to include seat belt extenders, quick release seat belt options, and electronic/operational indicators recording seat belt use.

### **Stress Management (PTSD)**

Police officers ceaseless exposure to traumatic occurrences has consequences that can impact ones work performance, yet identifying which officers are more susceptible is extremely difficult. Perhaps the most prevalent and unfortunate risk is the uncanny ability to lose compassion for and understanding of the community you serve. Police officers fitting this profile are walking “time bombs”.

Law Enforcement Agencies must be creative, such as working with unions to rotate officers assigned to stressful communities; publicly rewarding officers who are intimately involved in solving community conditions and ensuring all command personnel are trained to identify at-risk factors that may “snowball” into major complications or community unrest. And lastly, support an Agency report culture that continuously reinforces the advantages reporting is to the community, the Agency, and the police officer.

NOBLE provides the following additional recommendations:

- Consideration of specific assessments of police hires from military deployments after initial traumatic incidents in police department.
- Engagement with health care providers to enhance coverage of behavioral and mental disorders.
- Collaboration with treatment centers and behavioral professionals to identify best practices and solutions in respective communities.

### **Physical Fitness**

From 1983 to 1993, a study was conducted by the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research that randomly sampled approximately 1,700 officers from different law enforcement agencies across the country. The results show that when compared with the general population, officers’ average fitness levels are below normal in the areas of aerobic fitness, body fat, and abdominal strength and average in upper-body strength and lower-back flexibility. The data shows that law enforcement officers are less fit in most areas than at least half of all U.S. citizens despite the fact that the physical demands of their profession require that they be more fit than the average person.

NOBLE provides the following recommendations:

- Physical fitness incentives for exercise and body weight parameters associated with optimal health.
- Nutrition and health lifestyle departmental endorsements throughout agencies.

- On duty physical fitness allowance.
- Collaboration with local and national fitness center chains for discounted law enforcement memberships.

### **Training and Safety Equipment**

It is critical that law enforcement reevaluate its training methodologies to ensure that they reflect the 21st century needs and incorporate cultural competency training for police officers that is part of recruit and in-service training.

NOBLE recommendations are the following:

- Technology and innovation seminars to departmental personnel for operational suggestions and personnel buy in.
- Educational and training incentives via foundations, grants, etc. to promote higher education and training.

### **Internal Procedural Justice - Treatment of Officers and Fair Discipline Process**

Procedural justice is the idea of fairness in the processes that resolve disputes and allocate resources.

Internal procedural justice recommendations:

- Progressive discipline review by internal and external advocacy units.
- Corrective action parameters subject to legal review.
- Mandatory external agency investigation in high profile incidents and officer involved shootings.
- Treatment of Officers:
  - Review and assessment of post incident status of officers to include demotions, reassignment, work schedules, etc.
  - Transparency policy to include complaint hotline for retaliatory practices.
- Fair Discipline Process:
  - Collaborative review by internal and external Office of Professional Standards and civil review boards to identify inconsistent practices and policies.

### **Labor / Management Partnerships**

NOBLE recommends strategic retreats and planning sessions with legal, business, government, civil rights, and non-profits to collaborate on positive outcomes on labor/management issues.