

Testimony of Dr. Cedric Alexander
National President of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement
Executives (NOBLE)
Before the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil
Rights and Human Rights
Hearing on “The State of Civil and Human Rights in the United States”
December 9, 2014

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, and members of the Subcommittee, I bring you greetings on behalf of the Executive Board and members of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives – NOBLE.

My name is Dr. Cedric Alexander, National President of NOBLE, and Deputy Chief Operating Officer for Public Safety, DeKalb County, GA. It is an honor to be here today to participate as a witness in the Senate’s hearing on “The State of Civil and Human Rights in the United States”. I want to acknowledge and thank Chairman Durbin for holding this hearing and inviting me to participate.

I speak to you from the perspective of a person who has over 37 years of law enforcement experience and who has held positions at the highest levels both at the federal, county, and city levels. In addition, I hold a Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

I represent an organization, NOBLE, whose 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.

It is my position that this country has the unique opportunity TODAY to address the lack of trust and understanding of law enforcement by communities of color. It is imperative to every citizen that we collectively deploy solutions in the areas of training, community policing, and technology to ensure that America is secure both domestically and internationally.

Secondly, through these solutions, we are able to further the hopes and dreams of many of our forefathers in realizing true Civil Rights and Human Rights as stated in the Declaration of Independence: *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

The recent events in Ferguson, Missouri and in Staten Island, New York, when combined with real and/or perceived attacks on civil rights legislation, have created an environment where many people of color feel disenfranchised by their national and local governments. More importantly, there is a pervasive belief (right or wrong) that the lives of minorities are of less value than that of their counterparts.

Solutions to Building Bridges of Understanding and Partnership Between Law Enforcement & Communities They Are to Protect & Serve

Training

Cultural competency is a critical component to bridging the gap amongst law enforcement and communities of color. It is the foundation for people of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds to interact effectively. When developed and implemented as a framework, cultural competency enables systems, agencies, and groups of professionals to function effectively to understand the needs of culturally diverse groups. 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 the recruit and in-service training.

Militarization of police has become a growing concern and interest throughout our country in recent years due to the use of tactical equipment and gear to combat everyday crimes. The 1033 Program was created by the National Defense Authorization Act in 1997 as part of the U.S. Government's Defense Logistics Agency Disposition Services (DLA) to transfer excess military equipment to law enforcement agencies. Every year, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of military equipment flows from the federal government to state and local police departments. As a result, departments have implemented the use of military equipment, as seen during recent events in Ferguson, which has unfairly targeted American citizens. There must be justification, accountability and training to support the continued use of such tactical measures. NOBLE feels that training is a key component of ensuring the correct application of this type of resource.

Community Oriented Policing

It is our recommendation that the law enforcement community adopt community policing as the philosophy of policing in the U.S.

Here are the key components of community policing:

- Community policing allows officers to demonstrate their support for the community. Residents and officers are allies. Officers respect and protect

the civil rights of residents. Racial profiling and other forms of discrimination are strictly prohibited.

- Community policing demands that officers interact with people who live or work in neighborhoods that they patrol. Officers are trained to communicate with people, solve community problems and develop an appreciation of cultural and ethnic differences.
- Community policing emphasizes the importance and value of human life. The use of excessive force is absolutely prohibited and deadly force is reserved strictly for when an officer's life or the life of a citizen is at risk.

NOBLE has launched a pilot program entitled "The Law and Your Community" through funding from the Department of Justice – COPS Office. The program's aim is to develop trust and understanding between law enforcement and the community. The Law and Your Community is an interactive training program for young people ages 13-18 designed to improve their communications with law enforcement officers and their understanding of their federal, state and local laws. Components of the program include:

- Citizenship: What does it mean to be a citizen? What are the laws governing everyday life including traffic laws? What are your rights as a citizen?

- Basic Laws: Understanding the basic laws governing issues such as “stand your ground,” gun ownership, staying safe within your community, and maintaining positive affiliations – including peer relationships, maintaining good grades, adult relationships, and benefits of mentors.
- Law Enforcement Engagement: Educating young people and adults on how to engage and navigate communication with law enforcement officers, what is community policing?, and understanding the realities of working in law enforcement.

Technology

We feel that technology can be leveraged to support the effective implementation of community policing and ensure maximum transparency to the public. Through technology, partnerships with communities can be strengthened in the areas of problem-solving and partnership initiatives. Likewise, there is an important role in applying technology in improving the effectiveness of law enforcement training.

Listed below are technology recommendations:

- Requirement of body cameras for law enforcement officers.

- Deployment of various social media platforms to allow law enforcement departments to better communicate and interact with local residents.
- Use-of-force and firearms training systems.

By implementing these recommendations on training, community policing and technology, we believe that real progress can be made in improving the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve. This would greatly improve the state of civil rights and human rights in America. I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions.