

Testimony
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)
Before the President Barack H. Obama Task Force on 21st Century Policing
January 9, 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:

- Defining the role of the police in a democratic society
- Building a culture of transparency
- Hiring a diverse workforce
- Procedural justice
- Racial reconciliation
- Community engagement and dialogue
- Improving police and youth relations
- Police leadership development
- The role of police unions (and line officers) in building trust

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.

It is NOBLE’s position that this country has the unique opportunity through this task force 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 focus areas listed above to ensure that America is secure both domestically and internationally.

Policing in the 21st Century, as exemplified by the atypical human cataclysm playing out nationally, screams out for a plenary revisit of the fundamentals of policing in America. No longer will cliché such as the need for “Community Policing”, along with tepid proactive steps be enough to quench a disquiet and dubious public equipped with near nanosecond social media illustrations of alleged police misconduct. Clearly, the old paradigm is a receipt for continued failure and potential turmoil.

Purposeful or not, the vehement protests have stimulated the conscience of our nation and fueled an earnest diatribe on how police patrol the cities of America. The President's task force must seize the occasion with forceful and profound recommendations that impact all.

Task Force Recommendations

Defining the Role of the Police in a Democratic Society

A democratic society is defined as a government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. If one believes this to be true, then law enforcement, in particular the police, take an oath to protect and serve this very definition of a democratic society. More importantly, the police are protecting and serving the citizens that comprise the democratic society.

A recommendation by NOBLE is for the task force to establish a clear set of expectations and guidelines that define the accountability and oversight of police to and by ALL the American people.

Building a Culture of Transparency

Opacity is the trademark of the criminal justice system in most cities in the United States. Grand Juries, Interrogations, Arrest processing, and even failure to identify officers are examples of irritations that erode public confidence. The President's Task Force recommendations should highlight the need for the authentication of Police/Community contacts validated by the use of body cameras; interrogations corroborated by the use of videos; and the standard of non-dilatory release of facts in situations involving sensitive police involved shootings. Similarly, police disciplinary action, if warranted, be open for public review.

Hiring a Diverse Workforce

The challenge to hiring a diverse workforce in law enforcement is reflected by the faces of the organization's leadership. The key to diversity in law enforcement is visibility of diversity, opportunity to engage people on their terms, and opportunities to advance.

The success of hiring a diverse workforce in law enforcement is not different from the private sector. Over the years private organizations have learned their customer base

and market share has increased as their engagement of diversity increased. They increased the visibility of different faces and voices (ethnic backgrounds) at the executive conference table. Every different face around the executive table is a link to exponentially more networks. Law enforcement has been slow to grasp this fact and only discusses the concept when large-scale conflict erupts.

NOBLE provides the following recommendations:

- The law enforcement organization's materials and communications must suggest there are opportunities for the populations that would increase the organization's diversity.
- Diversity recruitment starts at the CEO and command level positions.
- An opportunity or challenge to hiring a diverse workforce can be found in the advancement of officers of color.
- A concerted effort has to be made to reach minority populations on their terms and where they reside. We must remember that law enforcement careers may not be a family tradition in key populations of interest.
- The critical element of a diverse workforce is retention. Your current workforce is your best recruiters for diversity or your organization's loudest critics.

Procedural Justice

A part of NOBLE's mission is to ensure the equity in the administration of justice. NOBLE recommends that the task force evaluate and address the perception of many that the application and enforcement of the law is not equitable and fair in all communities. A key part of this is the analysis of the entire criminal justice system to include transparency, rates of incarceration, policing, and fair sentencing.

Racial Reconciliation

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 local and national 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.

This combined with public statements and in some cases actions by key law enforcement stakeholders aimed at minimizing or discounting the above point of view only inflame the current environment.

A recommendation by NOBLE is that the task force look to integrate into its work a public dialogue with a goal of developing tangible next steps and bridges of understanding between various minority and majority organizations. A great starting point is a status update on the progress of President Barack Obama's – "My Brother's Keeper". For example: A key common community interest is *effective crime reduction*.

Community Engagement and Dialogue

It is critical that law enforcement leaders at the highest levels of state and national government engage in public dialogue as it relates to the recent events related to both the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice as well as the killings of police officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu.

NOBLE proposes that a series of town halls be conducted in communities across the country aimed at law enforcement CEOs and community leaders addressing concerns of public trust while educating the public on what law enforcement is and is not.

It is imperative that the task force recommend solutions to address the delivery in some cases of inaccurate information that helps to create civic unrest that is not based on facts. To accomplish this, there needs to be a systematic understanding that the lack in some cases of transparency and communication by law enforcement authorities helps to create an environment of confusion and mistrust. As a result, the media outlets have become the authorities and educators on law enforcement.

Improving Police and Youth Relations

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

The model of policing where officers walk or stand on their "beat" or spend hours in their patrol cars without engaging the community is a relic that everyone understood for a long time was obsolete. Inexplicably it continues today. The President's Task Force recommendations should include strategies on changing the culture of law enforcement to be service oriented. But perhaps, the greatest obstacle to the accomplishment of a service oriented policing model is the failure to train officers on how to effectively use their most potent weapon, their voice. Thus, the recommendations should detail ways to vigorously train young officers in the art of verbally engaging the community. All future evaluations and advancements, civil service or not, should be considered in light of an officer's ability to engage the community and follow the principles of service oriented policing.

Secondly, it is NOBLE recommendation that the task force recommend a greater focus and priority for law enforcement to support youth based programs in the areas of Mentoring and Law Literacy. NOBLE acknowledges and thanks the Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services Office for the funding of its Law & Your Community Pilot Program which 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 local, state and federal laws.

Police Leadership Development

The mantra of training is the logical consequence of inappropriate police action. However, oftentimes the focus of additional training is directed at the “Line” officer. Yet, the preeminent reason a police organization is dysfunctional or not, rests on the quality of supervision that police officers receive. Police organizations that have unfettered control of its officers are agencies with a scatter and unbalanced approach to the communities they serve.

NOBLE’s recommendation is that the task force should expound on the correlation between a professionally trained supervisory staff and positive community relations. In essence, someone must ensure that the policies, regulations and interactions designed for improving relations with the community are followed or at the least there are consequences for deficiencies. Thus with appropriate supervisory training, they can become appreciative of their vital role and learn the elements of how to be supervisors that understand the need for accountability.

The Role of Police Unions (and line officers) in Building Trust

Real and sustained reforms require on-going discussions, input and commitment from these critical stakeholders. They must understand that positive police/community relations hinge on their ability to support each other in this engagement that benefits all. That said, historically of all the stakeholders, Police Unions have been the most reticent. Consequently, the task force must develop guidelines that emphasize the critical importance of Police Unions input when municipalities or Police Organizations are crafting policies. Relationships with the Police and Community are not maintainable without “buy-in” from the Police Unions.