

The Law Enforcement Steering Committee

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Blueprint for Progress in Policing

I. Introduction

National representatives of the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, the Fraternal Order of Police, the International Brotherhood of Police Officers, the Major Cities Chiefs, the National Association of Police Organizations, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, the National Troopers Coalition, the Police Executive Research Forum, and the Police Foundation, all of whom are participants in the Law Enforcement Steering Committee (LESC), have gathered in Washington, D.C., for their annual principals meeting to consider pending issues of major significance to policing in the years to come.

Over the past six years LESG members have worked diligently on common law enforcement goals and have been able to articulate to the White House, the Congress, and the people their concerns for achieving a safer, crime free and drug free, law-abiding, and harmonious American society. We have expressed our concerns over the increase in violence and crime, the increasingly easy availability of weapons to criminals and the need for more effective and professional law enforcement.

We believe and opinion surveys show that police services are valued by the community. Police officers are ranked higher than many other professionals in measures of trust and respect. Nonetheless, the public perception of the police has suffered recently, owing to a number of factors, not the least of which are highly publicized and controversial incidents involving the behavior of a very small number of the half million police officers in this country. Police have a very difficult, complex, and dangerous job. The vast majority of officers in this country carry out their duties with professionalism and sensitivity. Those who act beyond their authority have created problems that adversely affect the police field and our communities. We must find ways to keep and enhance the public trust while continuing to improve police services.

It is in this spirit, that those assembled today have come to the following agreement on a number of the challenges that face the police community today and in the years to come. We would only add that we are well aware that police cannot stand alone in the fight against crime and disorder in our cities. It will require an effort involving the entire community and government institutions at the local, state and federal levels.

II. Healing the Community and Improving Police Services

Community/Police Relations--Eruptions of violence in various cities have been accompanied by expressions of public distrust and even hatred of those who enforce the law. While that distrust may or may not be justified, the police often become the lightning rod for community discontent with government. Police do, however, have it within their power to change their image and, moreover, have a responsibility to encourage effective communication and mutual trust between themselves and members of the community. Police should make a systematic effort to analyze their relationship with the community, to identify factors that create conflict between the police and community, including race and socio-economic class, and to develop an action plan to resolve that conflict.

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Cultural Bias Training—Police departments should carefully screen applicants to find the best possible police recruits in order to minimize the impact of biases held in the broader society. When these biases spill over into the performance of police duties, they serve to alienate members of the community, encourage distrust, and engender violence against officers in the street. Even if a police officer is not clearly biased against members of a given group, cultural differences between the officer and those he or she serves may create misunderstandings that have the same destructive effect as prejudice. Police departments, particularly those in communities with diverse populations, must initiate cultural-bias programs and procedures in order to enable officers to do their jobs better by better understanding the diverse nature of the society. Cultural diversity training is an integral part of any community-oriented policing program. All training must be done by credible, experienced trainers and have practical application for the police.

Agency Composition—It has been relatively recent that women, blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities have moved into policing in great numbers. Their representation on many police forces still significantly lags their percentage in the broader population. Nonetheless, it is an accepted principle among police leaders that community relations are improved and the degree of trust in the department increased if the police force is representative of the community. Thus, the police should make concerted efforts to recruit greater numbers of minorities and women, and to insure as well that prejudicial barriers to their advancement into the higher ranks are removed.

Police Accountability—No other profession is held to such strict scrutiny as the police. Police must answer to citizens, local politicians, prosecutors, the media, and the courts, to name a few. We are committed to maintaining appropriate accountability measures in the law enforcement community. In order to maintain and improve the trust and respect of community members, police must act within the proper confines of their authority. In the pursuit of their duty to protect all citizens, police do not have the discretion to violate the rights of individual citizens. Unnecessary use of force or other misconduct must be strictly prohibited by police policy and corrected when violations are substantiated.

Community Policing—It is clear that new policing strategies in which police are in close contact with residents of the community and in which the police and residents become partners in solving community problems offer the best hope for improving the quality of life for all citizens we serve. While change will be difficult and may even require additional resources, it seems obvious that holding to the status quo has not been productive. Police leaders must take responsibility for adopting more progressive, department-wide policing strategies and for bringing about the necessary cultural changes those strategies require, including the retraining of current officers and the recruitment of new officers who will fit the community policing mold.

Quality Leadership—Sound management theory calls for leadership that empowers those who are led. The traditional top-down structure of most police departments often fails to sufficiently involve the rank and file of the department in planning and decision making. The officer on the street has firsthand knowledge of what is happening in the community and is the one who is asked to implement management decisions in that community. In community policing strategies, in particular, the beat officer is given responsibility for identifying and helping alleviate community problems. It is therefore imperative that these officers be included in the planning, goal-setting, and evaluative processes of the police department.

Hate Crime Laws—In recent years, so-called hate groups have grown and exploited racial tensions in communities across the nation. One of the tools created to combat these groups is the Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990. Under the act, police officers are now

being asked to determine whether a crime should be reported as a hate crime. The criteria used to make that decision should be clear and law enforcement leadership should ensure that they are followed. A recent Supreme Court decision striking down a broad hate crime ordinance from St. Paul, Minnesota has raised some question about the constitutionality of other crime statutes, but data collection initiatives, such as the one mandated by the Hate Crime Statistics Act, are not affected by the Supreme Court's decision in *R.A.V. v. St. Paul*. Law enforcement agencies should thus continue to aggressively collect information on suspected hate crimes.

Media Fairness and Professionalism—The media in this country has remarkable power. With that power, comes responsibility. Many in the police community believe that sensational or biased media coverage of police activity has exacerbated police/community tensions and contributed to diminishing public trust in the police. The police community urges fair, objective coverage of police issues, which would include provision of in-depth programming to supplement raw video footage that has become the currency of a style of reporting that can engender confusion and frustration rather than enlightenment and reason.

It should also be noted that the entertainment industry's glorification of violence contributes to the prevailing value systems that are played out every day in the gratuitous violence against both the police and the citizenry. Moreover, the stereotypical portrayal of police as aggressive crime fighters focuses attention on a very narrow portion of the services that police actually perform; the majority of police activity involves providing other valuable services to the community. While recognizing the Constitutional protections of the First Amendment, we urge the industry to take a socially responsible approach in the production of entertainment for the American public.

Victimization—The law enforcement community recognizes the need to provide greater assistance to victims of crime. They must not continue to be revictimized by an ill-funded, equipped, or organized response. Assistance to a victim does not end with the filing of a report, an arrest, or a conviction.

Support for Law Enforcement Professionalism—Law enforcement professionals must make critical public safety decisions every day. These must be made without the intrusion of partisan political concerns. Given the current levels of accountability police leaders are subject to, they must be insulated from political whims if police reform is to be enduring.

III. The Federal Role in Achieving Safer Communities

There is great debate going on over which crime bill is best for the country. Let's stop worrying about partisan politics. We are prepared to mediate the dispute between Congress and the President on this much needed Crime Bill. Both parties have received this offer and law enforcement stands ready to help in any way that will ensure in this session legislation that will make our communities safer places to live. We are here to tell you, police can not afford to wait another session for the support we so desperately need -- neither can the citizens we are sworn to protect. Community policing grants; the Brady Bill, legislation that would finally provide police with a national waiting period and cooling off period in which background checks can be conducted; school violence reduction programs; and adequate funding for law enforcement are just some of the cultural provisions police need to help them do their jobs.

Law enforcement agencies have taken on an increasingly broad role in addressing crime and the conditions that result in criminal activity and disorder, but with limited resources. Law enforcement agencies are doing more with less.

The burden of funding law enforcement agencies falls mainly on the various state and local governments. To better serve all citizens, more help, financial and otherwise, is of critical importance.

To this end, we urge Congress and the Administration to provide for the following:

- Enhancement of the lines of communication between federal, state and local agencies involved in the public welfare of our citizens.
- Research assistance to measure the feelings and attitudes of the general public pertaining to the criminal justice system.
- Funding of Task Forces to study the crime problem in this country, to involve the federal, state and local levels.
- Assistance in upgrading educational programs in correctional facilities to reduce the high recidivism rate.
- Conversion of existing, excess military bases into State correctional facilities.
- Funding for implementation of community-oriented policing programs as needs are identified.
- Increased funding for research that directly benefits the officer on the street and for development of non-lethal force tactics.
- Additional funding for Kindergarten- through -12th grade school programs, such as DARE & Adopt-A-Cop.
- Assistance with Public Service Announcements that send a vital anti-crime, anti-drug message through the television & radio media, which includes changes in F.C.C. regulations to require airing during "prime-time."
- Enactment of legislation that would provide for a percentage of a convicted person's fine to be given to witnesses and/or informants that provide information that leads to the arrest and conviction of felons, and encourage the various states to do the same.
- Expand asset forfeiture laws to all major crimes and include protections that would guarantee that the money will go to law enforcement activities.
- Enhancement of educational programs for state and local law enforcement officers.

Crime does not stop for elections; the Congress should not either. Law enforcement, and the country, need a Crime Bill now.