

CHALLENGES FACING LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Good morning. Mr. Chairman and members of the House Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations, I am honored by the invitation to address this distinguished body.

The "Challenges Facing Law Enforcement in the 21st Century" are numerous and varied dependent upon whether it is a local, state or federal entity. Domestic terrorism, gangs, illegal narcotics, gun violence, cyber-crimes, social media, behavioral health and highway safety issues pose significant challenges for law enforcement at all levels, and this is not an all-inclusive list by any means. In addition to those widely recognized concerns, there exist three pressing matters that are demanding our immediate attention, particularly at the local level: (1) Community-police relations, (2) Recruitment and Retention, and (3) Budgetary Restraints. Our ability and capacity to respond appropriately and effectively to the aforementioned concerns are largely dependent upon how well we manage these three foundational issues.

Highly publicized police-citizen encounters have gotten the attention of our nation. Increasingly, citizens are interested in how police departments operate and the decisions made by law enforcement practitioners. Now more than ever, questions about police accountability, police training (use of force), and organizational culture (implicit bias or racial profiling) are common. As a result of the intense scrutiny, improving community-police relations is paramount. Even agencies such as my own that have traditionally valued and focused their efforts on community engagement must continually strive to strengthen those relationships and to build new ones. Public safety is the entire community's responsibility, and we will not be as responsive or as successful without strong collaborative partnerships.

With "baby boomers" retiring and shrinking applicant pools, recruiting and retention is a struggle for law enforcement agencies today. The inherent dangers of the profession and its intense scrutiny and harsh criticism discourage some from entering and/or remaining in law enforcement while others pursue more lucrative, less stressful and safer career fields. Minority recruitment poses even a greater challenge. Retention has been negatively impacted by tightening budgets that have resulted in stagnant wages, increased cost of employee

benefits and limited performance based incentives and special skills pay. This funding issue segues into the third and final challenge I wish to share with you this morning – budgetary restraints.

In a climate where government bodies are plagued with lingering economic woes and are forced to make very difficult choices about their budgets, most police departments are underfunded. Consequently, it has become increasingly difficult to compete with “Corporate America” for qualified applicants and to retain experienced personnel. We also face the growing necessity for advanced technology, for example body worn cameras, less than lethal weapons, integrated records management and interoperable communications systems; some are unfunded mandates. Leaders must figure out how to integrate the technological advancements into their agencies with limited funding. Many law enforcement agencies committed to equip officers with body-worn cameras which expanded the opportunities for officers to capture more of those critical police-citizen encounters. But, this technology comes with a cost. Additional funding from governmental sources will be needed not only for equipment but for training that enhances the diversity consciousness of law enforcement professionals such as implicit bias, de-escalation, use of force and other subject matters deemed necessary. Although the specific need(s) may vary, the challenge or dilemma is the same. There is increased scrutiny and greater expectations from the citizenry, but unfortunately there are less and/or inadequate resources and personnel to meet their demands.

In conclusion, I reiterate these issues must be immediately addressed. Enhancing community-police relations is fundamental to “local” law enforcement gathering information and proactively combating crime and terrorism; this includes building community partnerships to solve an array of societal problems. Recruiting and retaining law enforcement professionals at the local level will ensure that we have a highly trained and experienced workforce to provide police-related services and conduct complex investigations, whether they involve criminal activity, terrorism, or a nexus between the two. We need enhanced capabilities to handle current issues as efficiently as possible and to give us the time we need to look toward the future to anticipate and prepare for new crime trends and emerging opportunities.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to share my views on the “Challenges Facing Law Enforcement in the 21st Century”. Thank you for your time.