THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES
WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD
PRESIDENT’S TASK FORCE ON
21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY POLICING

“BUILDING TRUST AND LEGITIMACY”

Founded in 1935, the National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents the interests of county governments before Congress and federal agencies. NACo is pleased to submit recommendations to the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Community Policing on the topic of Building Trust and Legitimacy.

Counties play an instrumental role in our nation’s justice system. In the U.S., there are 3,105 county police and sheriff’s departments that ensure the safety and security of our nation’s citizens. Each year, counties spend over $70 billion on justice and public safety services, of which $30.2 billion is spent on police and sheriff’s departments, $23.3 billion on correctional facilities and $16.7 billion on county courts and legal services. Annual county expenditures in the justice and public safety arena surpass investments in health ($69.7 billion), transportation and infrastructure ($52.2 billion) and county management ($25.6 billion). As evidenced by the large investment in justice and public safety, counties recognize the importance of building and maintaining safe and secure communities.

The community policing philosophy is one that the NACo endorses and adopts as a way to achieve meaningful reductions in crime: “NACo enthusiastically supports community policing as a crime fighting strategy that encourages law enforcement to work in partnership with the community to prevent and seek solutions to problems in the criminal
justice system with systems integration principles and goals...community policing stresses the prevention of crime before it occurs. Core components of community policing include partnering with the community; problem solving; and transforming policing agencies to support and empower frontline officers, decentralize command and encourage innovative problem solving. ”iii

Building upon these components, NACo recommends the following: To build trust and legitimacy between the law enforcement community and the community at large, NACo supports establishing:

1) Systems of transparency and a
2) Culture of collaboration and flexibility to implement creative community-based solutions.

RECOMMENDATION

Building Systems of Transparency: Law enforcement agencies should have written policy that specifies the role of police in the protection of constitutional guarantees, enforcement of law, and maintenance of public order while responding to the needs of the community.iv

The control and improvement of crime are local concerns and as such, efforts to alleviate and prevent crime must begin at the local level.v Sharing the vision and mission of local law enforcement with the local community is the first step to establish a trusting relationship with the community. County police and sheriff’s departments across the country have already developed public statements that reflect their goals and philosophies on law enforcement.

For example, the mission statement for the Cumberland County, N.C. sheriff’s office states: “We have adopted a philosophy of Community Oriented Law Enforcement working in partnership with citizens to develop policing services to meet the unique needs of the community, while assuring fairness, equal treatment and protection to all.”vi Cumberland County’s Sheriff’s office further states in their vision statement: “The Cumberland County Sheriff’s Office vision for the future is to become a leader in Law Enforcement through Partnerships with the citizens we serve that promote crime prevention, mutual trust, and
strategies that ensure a high standard quality of life. Our future vision of Community Oriented Policing is anchored by the idea of establishing and maintaining a Partnership with the community we serve.\textsuperscript{vii}

Similar to Cumberland County, N.C. the police department in Fairfax County, Va. identifies the community policing philosophy in their mission, vision and values statement. The Fairfax County Police Department additionally states in their values that they believe “[t]he police and the community share in the responsibility for crime control and public safety.”\textsuperscript{viii}

Through these simple statements, law enforcement in Cumberland and Fairfax counties have established a foundation of transparency by notifying the community of their law enforcement philosophy. Mission and vision statements like those of Cumberland and Fairfax County, establish expectations for conduct and form a basis on which the community policing practice can grow.

**RECOMMENDATION**

*Building a Culture of Collaboration and Flexibility: Visible improvements in individual justice outcomes, built and sustained through strategic partnerships, can help build trust and legitimacy between law enforcement and the community at large.*

To build trust and legitimacy between law enforcement and the community at large, NACo also recommends the formation of strategic partnerships that enhance organizational efficiencies and lead to improved justice outcomes such as diversion from incarceration to treatment and the reduction of recidivism.

For example, in 2002, Bexar County, Texas started exploring the idea of integrating healthcare, law enforcement and the judicial system to transform the way mental health services are delivered to offenders with low-level offenses and have a mental illness.\textsuperscript{ix} At the time, Bexar County’s jails were essentially becoming housing units for the mentally ill and those with substance abuse problems.\textsuperscript{x} In five years, the program evolved into a successful, coordinated delivery network that makes a tremendous impact on the treatment of the mentally ill in the criminal justice system of Bexar County/San Antonio,
The partnership between the Bexar County Sheriff’s Office, the San Antonio Police Department and the Center for Healthcare Services has resulted in the creation of the Restoration Center, a mental and physical care facilities that helps divert the mentally ill from incarceration to treatment. Currently, 18,000 people utilize the Restoration Center each year and Bexar County and San Antonio save more than $10 million, annually, because of their collaborative efforts that replaced expensive jail and emergency room visits with community-based care. Further, law enforcement personnel are required to undergo 40 hours of crisis intervention training, which helps officers identify and address the needs of the mental health consumer. This type of despecialization is crucial to establishing an organizational structure that fosters a community-centric approach to crime reduction.

The partnerships in Bexar County were possible because there was a culture of flexibility that allowed for creative problem solving. The Allegheny County Jail Collaborative (ACJC) is another great example of collaborative problem solving that reduces crime. The ACJC is a joint effort of the Allegheny County Jail, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and the Allegheny County Health Department. The ACJC was established in 2000 with the goal of improving justice outcomes thereby increasing public safety while also achieving organizational efficiency. ACJC partners include department managers as well as representatives from the court, probation/parole and an evaluation team. They meet regularly and work to plan all in-jail, transitional and post-release services. Early indicators demonstrated a 15 percent reduction in recidivism within the community.

Bexar County is a great example of the beneficial outcomes of strategic partnerships. When law enforcement partners with other organizations, the community takes note of the outcomes. Trust and legitimacy are built through these types of collaborative efforts between law enforcement and the community at large.

CONCLUSION

Counties practice community oriented policing because it results in meaningful reductions in crime. Successful community oriented policing depends upon trust and legitimacy which is cultivated through transparency, collaboration and flexibility to implement creative solutions. Counties across America are doing excellent work to reduce crime, increase efficiencies while also ensuring safe and secure communities. NACo stands
ready to support the efforts of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing and welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Administration and other partners to promote trust and legitimacy between law enforcement and the community at large in order to achieve better justice outcomes and reductions in crime.

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2 Id.
4 Id. at 102.
5 Id.
7 Id.
10 Id.
12 Id.
14 Id.