



# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Houston Police Department**

Sylvester Turner, Mayor

1200 Travis Houston, Texas 77002-6000 713/308-1600

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May 17, 2017

Art Acevedo  
Chief of Police



To: **U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee**  
Chairman Bob Goodlatte

Re: **Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations**  
Chairman Trey Gowdy  
Vice Chairman Louie Gohmert

***Honorable Member Representatives:***

Sheila Jackson Lee, Jim Sensenbrenner, Jr., Ted Deutch, Steve Chabot, Karen Bass, Ted Poe, Cedric Richmond, Jason Chaffetz, Hakeem Jeffries, John Ratcliffe, Ted Lieu, Martha Roby, Jamie Raskin, Mike Johnson

**Written Testimony On Challenges Facing Law Enforcement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Building strong bonds with the community is the only way to be successful in policing. All the other important issues, such as police response to resistance, investigating officer-involved shootings, training, transparency, and response to immigration issues are all very important because when they are addressed to the community's satisfaction and expectations, you build trust and relationships. This is what I call relational policing and it is the linchpin that determines whether a police department will be successful.

In order to build a strong relationship with a community, police departments must engage all members of the community. Community engagement done correctly builds trust so that when something goes wrong, which is inevitable in a mission as complicated as law enforcement, the community knows that the department and its leadership will address the problem honestly and openly and take positive action to correct any deficiencies.

One of the challenges that law enforcement is facing in building trust among the community is immigration enforcement. Local law enforcement cannot be expected to be immigration enforcement officers while at the same time build strong relationships with the immigrant community. Immigration enforcement is a federal function that cannot be delegated to city police departments. Immigrant communities, whether documented or not, begin to fear local police officers when they become too heavily involved in immigration enforcement. They then



stop reporting crimes and coming forward as witnesses, which increases the victimization of immigrant communities and allows criminal conduct to go unchecked, making the entire community less safe. Community engagement must include everyone if a police department is going to be successful.

As the police chief of two different major cities over the past 12 years, with 31 years of law enforcement experience, I find that one thing that communities demand is transparency. There are a multitude of facets to transparency and numerous strategies to meet the community's expectations. When officers are involved in shootings or other use of force incidents, law enforcement must provide as much information as can be shared. There are times when videos and other evidence must be withheld, but if there is not a valid reason that overrides the public interest, then it should be shared. When information cannot be shared, explain why. If a law enforcement agency has been successful in building relationships, the community will be more likely to be understanding. The time to build trust and relationships is before a critical incident.

One of the ways departments around the nation have restored a community's trust is through the Department of Justice (DOJ) consent decrees. Consent decrees allow community stakeholders to ensure that police departments are held accountable. They require police departments to make changes, such as their response to resistance, conducting thorough internal investigations, and conducting fair and transparent investigations of police-involved shootings. The DOJ consent decrees push police departments to become more engaged by increasing community involvement and buy-in. While an investigation by the DOJ is difficult to accept at times, it pushes law enforcement to make changes that are required.

Just as importantly, consent decrees help law enforcement executives by forcing city leaders to provide funding that would otherwise not be available for critical expenditures. Consent decrees have pushed city leaders to provide crucial funding for various types of training, such as de-escalation training, mental health critical incident training, and other constitutional policing topics. Consent decrees have also forced cities to provide needed funding for critical Information Technology (IT) needs, such as Records Management Systems (RMS), Response to Resistance databases, Body Worn Cameras, and other critical needs that are essential to a police agency and the community they serve.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not stress the importance of federal funding for local law enforcement. Large cities such as Houston are in a constant battle to increase staffing, upgrade technology, and implement community outreach initiatives. All of the above costs a great deal of money; thus, it is imperative that the federal government continue to recognize the importance of grant funding from programs like the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants, the U. S. Department of Justice JAG Grants, and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program, to name just a few. These federally funded grants and programs are an investment in the largest communities in this great nation. Without the continued support of the federal government through grants and other programs, many of the community outreach and engagement strategies will languish.

I have briefly touched on a few of the hundreds of issues that law enforcement agencies and its officers face each and every day. Each and every strategy comes back to building relationships

with the community. Whether it is addressing a crime problem that is plaguing an area, addressing a traffic problem, or police accountability; the underlying theme is that we are here to serve the community. To do that we must build relationships to determine what the expectations are of those we serve and to build relationships that are based on trust and transparency.

Testimony Submitted By:



Art Acevedo  
Chief of Police  
Houston Police Department  
Edward A. Thomas Building  
1200 Travis Street  
Houston, Texas 77002  
713-308-1600  
Art.Acevedo@HoustonPolice.org