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NEW RELEASE

NATIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY LEADERS ISSUE POLICE REFORM BLUEPRINT

New Roadmap On How To Address Current Police Crisis & Rebuild Public Trust

CHICAGO — A national report, issued by [21st Century Policing Solutions](#), a group of public-safety leaders that includes former major-city police chiefs, argues that policing in the United States faces a threefold crisis with three linked elements:

- **Collapse of public trust in many communities;**
- **Sharp decrease in police officer numbers; and**
- **Rising crime after years of decline.**

The need to reform the way policing is done in towns and cities across the nation has become increasingly urgent as the drumbeat of high profile incidents continues, accompanied by the growing fear of rising crime. Many of these incidents have led to consent decrees, which are legal mandates for change to policing practices that can serve as important tools to kick-starting police reform efforts.

“Meaningful police reform is a solution to addressing violent crime and enhancing the quality of life in neighborhoods. It must happen now,” said Kathleen O’Toole, report author, who has served as chief of the Seattle Police Department from 2014 to 2018 and was previously the first female commissioner of the Boston Police Department. “Community members and police officers alike have waited long enough.”

Bringing to bare extensive national and international experience in police reform and consent decree implementation, the public-safety think tank has issued a report, [“Building Public Trust in Policing,”](#) that provides a roadmap for city leaders caught up in the policing crisis that has gripped cities across the nation.

To address the threefold crisis, the authors, O’Toole and Robert Peirce, an international policing consultant and former diplomat who played pivotal roles in Northern Ireland and Hong Kong negotiations, lay out a five-point plan that their experience shows will lead to timely, visible results that would enhance police legitimacy, public trust and community safety:

1. **Leadership:** City leadership that takes responsibility for public safety, a dynamic chief who is committed to authentic and transparent leadership and a united police command team committed to a culture of service, trust building and continuous improvement.

“Reform works best when you have a chief and leadership team at the top, who are wholly committed to putting these reforms in place. At the same time, it is critical that resources are shifted as close to the community as possible, and that solutions to violent crime are developed with the community and not in spite of them,” said

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Charlie Beck, former chief, Los Angeles Police Department. Beck also said, "It's important to prioritize improving morale among rank-and-file officers, which includes a fair promotional system - understanding that true culture change comes more from the bottom up than the top down."

According to the report, the police chief must be highly visible and constantly seek opportunities to engage constructively with sworn and non-sworn members at all levels of the police organization and with community members throughout the jurisdiction.

And a good chief isn't enough, the report stresses, "The sustainability of policing reform depends...(on) Mayors, city managers and city councils (who) are integral parts of policing leadership."

2. Community Engagement: Direct community involvement in the process of reform.

The report emphasizes that the community is an integral part of policing. Police leaders must be willing to meet with those who want to influence the change process as well as involve community members in the crime strategy development process on a localized level. When he established London's Metropolitan Police two centuries ago Sir Robert Peel said that "(T)he police are the public and the public are the police."

3. Neighborhood Policing: Making neighborhood policing the lifeblood of the police organization and prioritizing patrol.

The report says that "Community policing, properly understood, means authentic, effective partnerships between police and communities, and other agencies as appropriate, to solve problems that threaten community safety. It is perhaps more useful to use the term 'policing with the community.'"

This means establishing a police department's patrol function as the prime lever for fighting violent crime by policing with the community and shifting policing resources as close to the community as possible, while holding police leaders accountable for localized decision making. It also means establishing geographic accountability for officers in the field, which helps to build officer legitimacy and community trust.

For example, in 2015, the New York Police Department rolled out a neighborhood policing concept which it now sees as the cornerstone of policing in the city. It divided each precinct into sectors corresponding with established neighborhoods and assigned a dedicated team to each. The teams work only within their neighborhoods.

4. The Police & Community Are One: Having police officers who see themselves as part of the community, with recruitment, composition, training and conduct that reflect this goal.

- **Recruitment:** The police service should be diverse by race, ethnicity, and gender.
- **Composition and culture:** The department should reflect the composition of the community and the culture should emphasize service, teamwork, and courage.
- **Training:** Recruits should get both academic training from educational institutions and operational training from police academies.

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“Policing is a social service requiring a broad range of interpersonal and other skills,” the report says. “If it were marketed as such, it would command a broader appeal among jobseekers and attract people who would otherwise not be likely to consider it as a career option.”

5. **Accountability:** Making accountability a clearly defined, vital element of the reform, in which transparency of operations and information is central to the trust-building process. Swift investigations and adjudication are central to the establishment of police legitimacy in a community.

The report points out that internal and external accountability mechanisms are crucial. People outside the department should investigate serious misconduct, but the chief must be the one who decides whether or not an officer should be terminated. As the report says, ‘If a police chief is to be held responsible for the running of the department, that chief must be given the responsibility to run it.’

A Culture of Constant Reform & Innovation

Though sometimes guided by consent decrees, which the report says can provide “a comprehensive framework for reform” that brings “significant improvement in both policies and practices,” it argues that “Reform should not depend upon consent decrees alone.” Instead, though only a few of the 18,000 U.S. police agencies are under such court orders, all should “aspire to a culture of constant reform and innovation.”

The report concludes that: *“The current crisis in policing may do generational damage to community safety, and to the policing profession itself, unless the situation can be turned around quickly. Whether or not they are working through a consent decree, all departments should demonstrate a vision for reform, which should inspire communities and police officers alike to work towards a truly collaborative approach to policing and produce visible results within a short space of time. The five areas covered in this paper should inform the development of such a vision.”*

“The Joyce Foundation strongly believes that building police-community trust and legitimacy will improve safety for all. We also believe that effective implementation of tools like consent decrees will go a long way toward achieving the policing reforms necessary to rebuilding that trust,” said Quintin Williams, a program officer at the Foundation. “We supported this report because we hope that it can be a guide to law enforcement departments across the country as they strive to build safe and just communities.”

About. 21CP is a diverse, seasoned group of professionals who work to help communities transform the delivery of public safety services. They are police chiefs who have worked to turn around troubled police departments and renew community confidence in their agencies; civil rights lawyers and community leaders who have contributed to some of the country's most significant public safety initiatives and police reform efforts; and social scientists and academics who have spent careers understanding what can work in policing and what is possible in public safety. They work with communities, cities and police departments to make public safety work better for everyone, by helping cities design and implement practical, innovative solutions that reflect the unique needs of their communities. For more information please go to www.21cpsolutions.com.

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