**President’s Task Force Report**

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CJ 1010: Introduction to Criminal Justice

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**Introduction**

In the Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, several recommendations were made on how to improve the relationship between police and the communities they serve. Of these recommendations, the three that I felt that would be the most effective were as follows. The first recommendation being that law enforcement needs to have clear policies on use of force, and also needs to provide training for their officers on their policies. The second recommendation being that law enforcement should promote public trust through what are known as nonenforcement activities. The third and last recommendation being that law enforcement needs some form of civilian oversight. In this paper we will be discussing these three recommendations and the effectiveness of their implementation.

**Recommendations and Evidence**

Policies, while they can be boring and longwinded are an important part of law enforcement. Without clear policies, officers have a greater chance of making mistakes. The biggest mistake an officer could make would be to employ use of force that ended in loss of life when it wasn’t necessary. I chose the recommendation of having clear policies on use of force because I have seen firsthand what happens when authority figures have too much leeway. I believe that when rules and regulations regarding anything, especially use of force, are clearly defined it is easier to stay within the confines of what one is expected to do. Whether law enforcement or civilian, this holds true. This is why “law enforcement agencies should have comprehensive policies on the use of force that include training, investigations, prosecutions, data collection, and information sharing. These policies must be clear, concise, and openly available for public inspection” (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015, p.20). To back up my claim, one study cites that “the use of deadly force can be reduced when agencies have clear and less ambiguous use of force policies” (Lum, Koper, Gill, Hibdon, Telep & Robinson, 2016, p.16). I believe that if we can reduce unnecessary use of force, perhaps we can save lives.

The second recommendation I chose to explore was that “law enforcement agencies should proactively promote public trust by initiating positive nonenforcement activities to engage communities that typically have higher rates of investigative and enforcement involvement with government agencies” (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015, p.14). I believe that this, unlike some of the other recommendations recommended in the President’s Report, is a realistic way to improve community and law enforcement relations. Thinking back to when I was in high school, I remember being quite fond of my school’s law enforcement officer. He was a kind man that treated me fairly. This is not to say that I wasn’t into trouble, but he didn’t single me out nonetheless. His attitude toward me while I wasn’t getting into trouble helped me to see that he wasn’t trying to unfairly target me when I was getting into trouble. This helped to give me a positive view of law enforcement.

I believe that my experience could be shared by many others if they were able to interact with law enforcement in a positive situation or environment. Studies have shown that “problem-solving through situational prevention and community collaboration were more successful than those focusing more on increasing low-level arrests to decrease disorder” (Lum, et al., 2016, p.8). Positive interaction of all kinds falls into this category. It is always easier to prevent a problem than to fix a problem, especially when it comes to people and their attitudes towards law enforcement.

Lastly, I chose to talk about civilian oversight of law enforcement. I found this idea very interesting. We don’t often think of civilians having any kind of authority or oversight over police officers and other law enforcement; however, civilians do have their own authority of sorts. If we look at the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) we can see an example of this. Law enforcement relies on voluntary compliance of civilians to enforce the law. There are many more civilians than there are law enforcement officers, and with numbers comes advantage. As civilians, we do have oversight and authority over law enforcement, but only when we chose to.

I do not agree with the CHAZ and I don’t believe that the movement is beneficial to the cause I’m citing in this recommendation, nor the cause they are fighting for—whatever that is. However, it is an example of civilians shirking the authority of law enforcement and asserting an authority of their own. It should go without saying that it would be better if law enforcement and communities came together on peaceful terms, where the roles of each side were laid out and agreed upon. As recommended in the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, “some form of civilian oversight of law enforcement is important in order to strengthen trust with the community. Every community should define the appropriate form and structure of civilian oversight to meet the needs of that community” (2015, p.14). Studies have shown that “the rate of sustained complaints was less for agencies that had some form of civilian oversight.” (Lum et al., 2016, p.17). This is why I believe civilian oversight is an important recommendation for law enforcement to consider implementing.

**Conclusion**

I believe that the three recommendations I outlined in this paper would be beneficial to law enforcement and community relations if law enforcement chose to employ them. When I think of what law enforcement should look like, I often envision Andy Griffith. I believe that as time has passed and communities have grown, we have gotten father and farther away from that. Civilians don’t have personal relationships with officers. We see each other as an obstacle, just another person we have to deal with. With relationship comes understanding and patience. Out of the three recommendations I chose—clear use of force policies, law enforcement engaging in nonenforcement activities, and law enforcement having civilian oversight—I would say that having law enforcement engage in nonenforcement activities would probably be the most beneficial.

We all need to be more understanding of one another. This goes both ways. Tensions are so high in the United States right now, it is sad to watch. I understand both sides of the argument, however, I truly love my country. I believe that this is the Land of the Free, where anyone can come from nothing and make themselves into something. I don’t believe that blacks are being gunned down by officers just for being black, but I do believe that there exists a disconnect between law enforcement and the rest of us. It is my belief and my hope that the recommendations outlined in this paper and the President’s Report can close that disconnect, even if just a lit bit.

**References**

Lum, C., Koper, C.S., Gill, C., Hibdon, J., Telep, C. & Robinson, L. (2016). *An Evidence Assessment of the Recommendations of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing—Implementation and Research Priorities.* Fairfax, VA: Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, George Mason University. Alexandra, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police.

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