

We are listening...now let's act!

Since November 24, 2014, our country has seen many of its communities wage protests, both peaceful and violent, against the scourge of police brutality and indifference to minorities and marginalized members of our society. I have watched this unfold daily through various news outlets with great interest and concern. My interest stems not only from my profession and position as the Executive Director of the Citizens' Police Review Board, but also from my perspective as a black man in America. I have personally experienced some of the very mistreatment for which the residents are now protesting. Also, during my 24 years of service as a police officer, I, on numerous occasions, witnessed the disparate treatment of minorities by police officers and police administrators. However, more times than not I was privileged to bear witness to selfless acts of kindness and bravery by men and women who served their communities with dignity and honor. It is and always was the subsequent lack of resolve and inaction by police administrations to remedy the mistreatment, coupled with the deafening silence from the officers who otherwise bring honor to the oath they took to serve and protect which has always troubled me.

It is the present policing practices that fail to hold police officers accountable for their misconduct and the atrocities they commit against human beings. This same system, akin to the kind of policing practices that typified the pre-civil rights era, is what led people in communities all across the United States to rise up in protest and demand reform. It is a policing system that fosters distrust of law enforcement and the criminal justice system, alienates residents from local government, and creates the emotional, social, and civic detachment of residents from police officers and the agencies that oversee them.

Police officers across the country must understand they work for and are accountable to the communities they took the oath to serve. Sworn police personnel are subject to the demands of their ultimate employer: the citizenry. Our residents have made their voices heard and abundantly clear that they will no longer tolerate police misconduct, the abject killing of unarmed men and boys of color, and the sexual assault of women. They will also no longer tolerate racial profiling, and criminal behavior from those who have taken the oath to uphold the law. Community members and police administrators must demand change and work together to make change a reality.

I suggest a two pronged approach: (a) police agencies must take bold actions to protect citizens and rebuild trust; (b) community members must clearly articulate their law enforcement needs and work with local government and law enforcement to build a more harmonious society. For law enforcement, I suggest three bold actions: (a) terminate the most troublesome police officers and administrators; (b) challenge the tendency of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) to defend unprofessional officers; and (c) work to build bridges, ties, and cooperatives with diverse groups within community.

Terminate officers. One bold step is to terminate the worst offenders of public trust. These are the officers who have received the highest number of complaints or complaints that are so egregious that they shake the foundation of confidence one would have in their law enforcement agency. These officers are not to benefit from special considerations; length of tenure, political

affiliation, or rank within the police organization. This would immediately demonstrate to the community the police administration's commitment to rebuilding trust between communities of color and their respective law enforcement agencies.

Challenge the FOP. FOPs and police unions, across the country, must not defend officers who constantly engage in police brutality and misconduct. Police unions do the offending officer a disservice by not holding them accountable for their individual behavior. When police unions fail to hold their members accountable, they also fail the community and place responsible members at risk. Police administrators must challenge the FOP and police unions to revise their policies and operational procedures related to the legal defense of and advocacy for officers who have clearly violated police policies, state and federal laws, and who have placed residents and fellow officers at risk (risk of loss of life, liberty, personal safety, and the accumulation of material goods).

Build Bridges. City leadership, the police administration, and residents can, by working collaboratively, dismiss incompetent police officers from their respective police agencies and, simultaneously, provide support for the officers who tirelessly and with great pride, place their lives on the line for our communities. This is the right thing to do, as it does a great disservice to the overwhelming majority of men and women who serve their communities with honor, when police agencies retain officers who constantly commit acts of misconduct. The Citizens' Police Review Board works diligently to allow the community an opportunity to have their collective voice heard, not only on topics of police misconduct, but also on policy development within the police department. By working together with both the community and the police department we can help develop effective policing policies, which best serve the residents and law enforcement within the city of Oakland.

Community members, too, must be willing to work. Community members must: (a) abandon apathy, fear, and violent ideations about the policing community; (b) Engage in civic life: create routine and positive interactions with city government and law enforcement officers that will result in a safer community for all.

Abandon apathy and fear. Community members all across America must demand what it is they seek in police reform; they must remain relentless and refuse to take 'no' for an answer. They must also state, in clear terms, the ways they will be accountable to their communities and law enforcement agencies. They must be willing to participate at the grassroots and boardroom levels to make their communities better places to live. Residents must not condone violence in any manner: not in their neighborhoods and not under the color of protest. Residents are frustrated, in general, with White male dominated institutions for their routine and, more often than not, explicit devaluation of black and minority residents. Residents are equally frustrated, specifically, with those police officers, regardless of their race, who routinely direct violence toward Black and minority males which, too often, results in an officer killing a young Black or minority male. Even so, the continuance of violence, as a means of protest, will not result in positive results or achieve the goal of a peaceful community.

Engage in civic life. To enact change, the community must bring its demands to its government's leadership, at the federal, state, and local level. The time is now. In the police/community

relationship, the community is the employer and as such, when it is both reasonable and necessary, the community gives directives to government leadership and participates in policy review and formation. If government officials don't perform as directed or welcome feedback from the community it serves, those government officials, then, must be replaced through the electoral process. In this sense, civic participation saves lives and improves the quality of everyday life for all. With the necessity of more transparency in the police accountability process and the need for an independent and empowered citizen's review, your Citizens' Police Review Board becomes a vital advocate for the community. The Citizens' Police Review Board serves an essential role in rebuilding community trust and goodwill regarding law enforcement. Simply stated, no progress can be made until the community feels secure in the integrity of those entrusted to serve and protect them. Please care about your fellow man and woman, even if they are a criminal and/or a police officer. The stakes are high and your participation in civic life is essential if we are to avoid recurrent police misconduct and the additional unlawful loss of life by the hands of the police.

It is time that we all sit down and have the very difficult conversation with one another about making police reform a reality. We must recognize the part we played in how we arrived at where we are today. That will require us to cut open the wound and clean it completely out. That will require us to dismantle certain institutions and build new ones which protect and serve us all. That will require each of us to respect one another and the position from which they come; the ideas which they present; and the fears which they have as we move forward to making sure those we entrust to protect and serve do so with integrity, honor, and respect for everyone.

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