



**NATIONAL  
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**TESTIMONY**

**of**

**Chuck Canterbury**

**National President,**

**Grand Lodge, Fraternal Order of Police**

**on**

**“Building Trust and Legitimacy”**

**before the**

**President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing**

**13 January 2015**

**Good morning Chief Ramsey, Ms. Robinson and distinguished members of the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing and thank you for allowing me to be here today to share with you the perspective of the rank-and-file officers who serve in harm's way each and everyday in our streets and communities. I am the National President of the Fraternal Order of Police and have the honor to represent more than 330,000 officers of every rank in every region of the country. It is their views which I offer today for your consideration.**

**All of us here know that there has been an erosion in trust and respect between law enforcement officers and the communities they protect, particularly in communities of color. Similarly, law enforcement officers are growing more distrustful of the citizens in many communities because of an increase in violence that targets law enforcement officers. A rise in firearm fatalities and assaults, especially ambush attacks and flat-out assassinations, have forced officers to be more wary when responding to any call for service. That is why I have called upon the President and the Congress to amend Federal hate crimes laws to include police officers. Enough is enough!**

**It is imperative that we bridge the gulf of trust and respect between police and their communities and work together to bridge the gap. I am proud that law enforcement as a profession has been at the forefront in acknowledging and addressing this problem and I pledge to work with the Task Force to improve our profession and the safety of our officers.**

**I urge the Task Force to take a broad, holistic approach—the issues of trust and legitimacy are not just a law enforcement problem. It is a systemic issue throughout government and society. Our citizens and communities are losing faith in government services and in public officials and public servants. The lack of trust and respect may be most obvious in law enforcement because our officers are the most visible of government servants, but the issue is pervasive. Schools are failing parents and students alike, eroding confidence in the idea that, with a good education, anything is possible. Instead, schools process our children without guaranteeing them an education. Elected officials cannot make good on their promises and basic social services wither on the vine as funding dries up or the demand for service overwhelms the ability of the government to provide it. Poverty, both poverty of income and poverty of true opportunity, is the common denominator as more and more of our**

**citizens, especially our young people and people of color, no longer trust that the American dream is within their reach.**

**For a young man of color to finish high school without a basic education because of social promotion, he is robbed of opportunity and that's a kind of robbery law enforcement cannot respond to. His world view was likely shaped not by an American civics class, but by social media saturated with a subculture that celebrates anger toward authority, disrespect to women and willingness to use violence to ensure they are not disrespected especially in front of their peers, which often triggers a swift escalation of even the most routine encounter with police or other authority figures. I don't need to remind anyone here that these problems have been building for generations and a three month study will not provide all the solutions. This endeavor will have to be a permanent work in progress and we all need to commit ourselves to it.**

**The FOP wants to be part of changing the culture of policing, but we as a society and a nation also have a responsibility to make changes. We first must reject any notion that law enforcement culture is intrinsically racist. It is wrong to think a man a criminal because of**

**the color of his skin, but it is equally wrong to think a man is racist because of the color of his uniform. Enough is enough.**

**We must also reject the tacit legitimization of violence and law-breaking as a weapon or agent of social change. No grand jury decision or government action should result in local leaders, elected officials or national spokesmen justifying, openly or not, the burning of businesses, looting of shops or wanton destruction of property. When these criminal acts are not swiftly condemned as wrong but are instead met with a shoulder shrug or explained away as a completely reasonable release of pent up frustrations, we invite an increase in that violence which leads to events like the assassination of New York City Police Officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu. The killer of these two officers believed that his outrage at a perceived failure of justice was reason enough to end their lives and then his own. Enough is enough.**

**I also recall another assassination attempt in Tuscon, Arizona when a man who had become obsessed with Representative Gabrielle D. Giffords (D-AZ) killed five people and shot her in the head.**

**The trust gap and lack of respect for our government and its institutions led these two unbalanced men to see murder as a reasonable response. We need to get away from the inflammatory rhetoric so prevalent in our culture today which leads criminals and mentally unbalanced individuals to believe hostile and violent actions against police will be validated. I ask that we keep this goal uppermost in our minds as we go forward with discussions about police legitimacy, racial reconciliation, procedural justice and transparency.**

**I believe that one of the most important things we can do to strengthen the bonds of trust and mutual respect between government and our communities is to restore our public confidence in and commitment to due process. Law enforcement officers acknowledge that individual officers will have their actions scrutinized. Sadly, the media and public figures often engage in a rush to judgement and make statements about an event without all the relevant facts. This will sometimes inflame public passions and exacerbate the community situation, especially in cases where the initial opinions offered turn out to have been mistaken. This undermines trust and does damage to the concept of due process.**

**It is critical to demonstrate our faith in and commitment to due process. Due process must be unaffected by negative media coverage, threats of criminal activity, mass violence or other retribution by the public.**

**Law enforcement officers, as public employees, have the right to due process as anyone else in our nation. We need to make that clear, especially if law enforcement managers persist in efforts to create a database of “decertified” officers. The FOP has opposed this effort in the past and must continue to do so unless and until due process laws for all police officers are uniform throughout the nation. Perhaps this effort will bolster our latter efforts to improve due process for officers.**

**Thank you for having me here today and I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.**