



# LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSPECTIVES

**2016 IACP CRITICAL ISSUE LISTENING TOUR**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late August and early September 2016, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) conducted a series of critical issue forums in eight locations throughout the United States. The purpose of these sessions was to meet with and listen to police executives to gain a better understanding of the distinctive challenges they are facing within their communities and agencies, as well as to discuss and examine the vast array of challenges currently confronting the law enforcement profession as a whole.

At the end of the forum tour it became clear that, although the types of issues law enforcement agencies are facing are diverse, several broad, cross-cutting issues are common to all agencies. These issues, which included public trust, police morale, the recruitment and retention of police officers, the expectations placed upon police agencies, and the role of public safety officials in addressing public health issues, are interrelated and developments in one area can, and do, have significant impacts in another. In addition, it was also clear that many of the core elements of these issues extend beyond the scope of traditional law enforcement operations and demonstrate how the role of police officers has evolved to include responding to and addressing the impact of a number of broader social, medical, and community-wide topics.

It is clear that addressing these topics will require, as highlighted in the first recommendation of *The Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*, a broader societal commitment to support programs that take a comprehensive and inclusive look at community-based initiatives to address core issues such as poverty, education, and health and safety.

In addition to this general consensus, one overarching theme became apparent across all of the listening sessions—the shared resolve of law enforcement leaders to better understand existing gaps in trust; to clearly demonstrate law enforcement's commitment to the citizens they serve; and to work collectively to balance the public's expectations of safety and service with the realities of policing.

## TOUR OVERVIEW

The IACP Critical Issues Listening Tour began on **August 25, 2016**, and concluded on **September 20**. Sessions were held in the following locations:

**BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

**AUGUST 25**

**HOUSTON, TEXAS**

**AUGUST 26**

**SEATTLE, WASHINGTON**

**AUGUST 29**

**LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

**AUGUST 30**

**DENVER, COLORADO**

**AUGUST 31**

**ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

**SEPTEMBER 7**

**CINCINNATI, OHIO**

**SEPTEMBER 8**

**DETROIT, MICHIGAN<sup>1</sup>**

**SEPTEMBER 20**

<sup>1</sup> This was a cross-border meeting with representatives from a number of Ontario, Canada, police agencies.

# MORE THAN 450 POLICE LEADERS

Over the course of three weeks, more than 450 police leaders representing small, midsize, large, state, provincial, federal, tribal, and college and university agencies participated in these sessions. Although these sessions were facilitated by IACP President Terrence M. Cunningham and IACP Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer Vincent Talucci, the agenda for the discussion was determined by the participants.

At each session, participants were asked to share not only the challenges and concerns confronting their agency, but also the opportunities and solutions they have developed. Through their responses, the participants guided the discussion and helped to identify the core issues confronting the profession as a whole.

# BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING AGENCY



# BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING THE PROFESSION

## KEY ISSUES

In addition to the many distinct local or regional issues that were raised at each session, participants identified several cross-cutting core concerns that are affecting both their agencies and, more broadly, the profession.

### COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST

Among law enforcement agencies, there is a clear understanding of the importance of addressing community-police relations and the question of public trust. Questions surrounding community-police relations are no longer isolated to certain communities or certain departments and, instead, impact all agencies.

Participants stated that they are committed to finding a way to ensure their respective communities feel both respected and protected—and their officers have the support from both the community and local leaders that they need to succeed and thrive. In addition, a consensus was reached that, while this issue is much larger than just law enforcement, it is also one that falls primarily upon the profession to address.

Participants discussed the challenges that must be overcome in order to address this issue. These challenges include the evolution of law enforcement culture, the education of the public and political leaders as to the actual responsibilities of law enforcement officers, and an increased transparency of law enforcement operations and policies. Also noted was the essential task to better educate community members on how and why law enforcement officers operate in the fashion they do. Without the proper understanding behind law enforcement procedures, a community member viewing a law enforcement operation may misinterpret the officers' actions.

### POLICE MORALE

Related to the question of public trust and community-police relations was the topic of law enforcement officers' morale. A repeated theme throughout the sessions was that the current climate is extremely challenging for law enforcement officers, and it is taking a toll on both the morale and, in some cases, the effectiveness of the officers. This situation increases the risk that agencies will “de-police” in communities that are most in need of their presence and assistance.

The impact of the current climate is particularly challenging to law enforcement officers because many joined the profession in order to serve their fellow citizens and represent the best in their communities. In today's reality, law enforcement officers often feel that they are being viewed with suspicion by some segments of their community—and they are being perceived as the “new bad guys.” This has led many in law enforcement to reconsider their career choices.

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

A consistent theme throughout the eight sessions was the struggle that many, if not most, departments have with both the recruitment of new personnel and the retention of current officers. The difficulty of recruiting was traced to a number of factors:

- Public image of law enforcement and the decrease in public trust
- The expanded responsibilities of law enforcement officers
- Inadequate pay and benefits
- The inability of some potential recruits to afford the cost of academy training

In addition, the desire to hire highly qualified, diverse men and women who are representative of the communities they serve adds to the difficulty in hiring individuals to serve as law enforcement officers.

Many participants also relayed concern over the ability of their law enforcement agency to retain current officers and command staff. As referenced earlier, the current climate often leads officers to feel that they are being viewed with suspicion by their community members. This suspicion has led many to reconsider their career choices and consider professions other than law enforcement.

## EXPECTATIONS

A key challenge identified by participants is concern over the expectations that public leaders and members of the communities they serve have about the level of service expected from their law enforcement agencies. Years of budget reductions and service cutbacks in other government programs have, in many communities, left law enforcement agencies as the only viable option for community members in need of assistance. Of particular note is the impact—in terms of both manpower and other resources—that the lack of mental health treatment options, rehabilitation facilities, homeless shelters, and other support facilities have on law enforcement agencies. As a result, session participants expressed concern that their officers and agencies were being asked to do too much and fill in too many holes in the social safety net.

Additionally, participants felt a need to ensure that political leaders have clear and reasonable expectations of what services police officers can, and should, provide.

## PUBLIC SAFETY'S ROLE IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Participants also discussed the difficulty that their agencies are having in defining the proper role of law enforcement officers in protecting public health. Because of significant cutbacks in the health services provided, law enforcement agencies have often become the only option for many residents. This has turned officers into, in the words of one participant, “street corner physicians.” This poses a challenge for officers who are often ill-equipped and lack the training necessary to meet this need.

A top concern at each listening session was law enforcement's interaction with persons affected by mental illness. Participants stressed that the lack of mental health treatment options or mental health centers has left law enforcement officers as the de facto mental health providers in their communities.

Another related concern identified in several listening sessions is the struggle that agencies are having in addressing significant increases in homeless populations. Several participants referred to a “homelessness crisis” and noted that, as a result, they are seeing increased citizens’ complaints, rising crime rates, and increased calls for service.

Finally, participants highlighted the challenges posed to their communities by drug abuse and drug overdoses. Notably, the sessions held in locations that had decriminalized or legalized the possession of narcotics were also the ones that had the most significant concerns with public health issues, homelessness, and increases in property crime.

## SESSION RECAP

### BOSTON

The first listening session was hosted by the Norwood, Massachusetts, Police Department on Thursday, August 25, 2016. Attendance included approximately 50 law enforcement leaders from New England. The conversation touched on a number of topics including the following:

- Community-police relations
- Use of force
- Officer safety and wellness
- Mental health
- Firearms

A consistent theme throughout the discussion was the need for better communication efforts, educating the public about the realities of policing, and partnerships with the community. Equally apparent was that, while there are frustrations about the challenges and issues the profession faces, law enforcement continues to seek and share solutions to better protect and serve their communities and ensure the health and safety of their officers.

### HOUSTON

The second listening session was hosted by the West University Place, Texas, Police Department on Friday, August 26, 2016. Attendance included roughly 50 law enforcement leaders from Texas. When discussing the issues most pressing to their agencies, participants shared many common challenges including:

- Recruitment and retention
- Low morale and officer safety and wellness as an outgrowth of the current policing climate and negative public perceptions of police
- Managing, maintaining, and keeping up with technological advancements, specifically body-worn cameras and social media

When asked about the most pressing issue facing the profession at large, failures of the criminal justice system broadly and mental health issues specifically were common themes. However, the most common refrain was public perception and media portrayal of police, particularly the lack of media accountability. Some participants were critical of the current federal government administration, citing a perceived lack of support for law enforcement. Relatedly, some participants expressed frustration with the IACP's leadership, suggesting a preference for political correctness over leadership and support of the profession.

The participants also discussed a few ways in which they felt IACP could provide support. Many called for a nationwide public relations media campaign to educate the public about the profession, its tactics, and processes. On a related note, help with recruitment and retention, to include officer safety, is also needed.

## SEATTLE

The third listening session was hosted by the Seattle, Washington, Police Department on Monday, August 29, 2016. Attendance included 40 law enforcement leaders from Washington and Oregon. During the discussion, attendees highlighted several key themes that were identified as the top concerns for their agencies and the law enforcement field at large, including:

- Homelessness
- Mental health
- Addiction
- Recruitment and retention (especially pertaining to women and officers of color)
- Community trust
- Officer safety and wellness
- Managing public expectations
- Use of force
- Lack of capacity for data collection and analysis
- Media attacks on the law enforcement profession

Participants offered several suggestions for IACP to provide support to the field including creating regional committees to collaborate and share information; expanding the opportunity for law enforcement agencies to participate in the Leadership in Police Organizations training program; and educating and collaborating with local governments on law enforcement issues.

Overall, attendees voiced gratitude at IACP's effort to provide the opportunity for law enforcement to be heard, and they expressed interest in learning about the outcomes from the other seven listening sessions around the United States.

## LOS ANGELES

The fourth listening session was hosted by the Huntington Beach, California, Police Department on Tuesday, August 30, 2016. Attendance included roughly 50 police chiefs and other police executives from the state of California.

The overall discussion was focused on community-police relations. Attendees relayed the frustrations surrounding the lack of public trust and the difficulty that gap creates to effectively do their jobs. In particular, chiefs discussed the fact that these issues are no longer just local issues and that events in one community can and do impact the attitudes toward police in other communities.

- Recruitment and retention of personnel
- Public health and safety impact of the legalization of marijuana
- Homelessness
- Property crimes
- Mental health
- Declining resources
- Lack of accurate and timely data
- Cost of technology

A particular concern raised during this session was the impact that several ballot initiatives have had on the ability of agencies to effectively combat crime and violence in their communities. Although the initiatives were purportedly designed to reduce incarceration levels within the state, participants made it clear that it was having a profound impact on local crime rates and quality of life in their communities.

## DENVER

The fifth listening session was hosted by the Aurora, Colorado, Police Department on Tuesday, August 30, 2016. Attendance included roughly 50 law enforcement leaders from Colorado and Wyoming.

When discussing the issues most pressing to their agencies, participants echoed one another on many common themes including homelessness, substance abuse, mental health, and staffing levels, which included both funding and recruiting and retaining qualified candidates. Participants also highlighted issues they felt are most pressing to the law enforcement profession at large and, while some of the topics were the same as those in individual agencies, others were introduced and reiterated by a number of individuals. These topics included the following:

- Community-police relations
- Guardian versus warrior
- Mission creep
- Public perceptions and legitimacy

The majority of the participants were from Colorado agencies, where marijuana has been legalized, and, while legalization was not voiced as a priority, there was discussion on how the dialogue around legalization needs to evolve, focusing on the effects such as related crime and impact on recruitment.

The participants also discussed ways in which they felt IACP could provide support. These areas included getting in front of issues with research and lobbying efforts, rather than playing a more reactionary role. Another topic on which participants looked to IACP for guidance on was the creation of national law enforcement messaging, particularly on the subject of community-police relations.

## ORLANDO

The Florida Listening Session and the sixth on the tour, was hosted by the Lake Mary, Florida, Police Department and the University of Central Florida Police Department on Wednesday, September 7, 2016. Attendance was roughly 50 law enforcement leaders from Central Florida.

A central focus was the challenge that individuals with mental health issues present to police and how law enforcement interacts with these individuals. Some participants were concerned about public trust being diminished and the actions law enforcement can take to improve public trust as a whole. Additional comments suggested that law enforcement leadership is being undercut by the media and politicians.

Another common theme centered around recruitment and retention, and many described their departments as having low applicant submissions; high attrition rates; and, most alarming, newly appointed officers choosing to resign from the agencies relatively soon after being hired. Reform within the juvenile justice system was also discussed.

## CINCINNATI

The seventh city on the tour was Cincinnati, Ohio, hosted by the University of Cincinnati on Wednesday, September 8, 2016. Approximately 50 chiefs and law enforcement executives from Ohio and Kentucky gathered for the listening session.

Each attendee had an opportunity to speak about the challenges that their departments and communities face. From this group, there was a diverse set of responses: recruitment and retention; drug-related issues (overdoses and drug-related crime); community-police relations; generational policing; training for leadership; mental health in the community, as well as within the department; violent crime; a feeling that “our good, strong community is existing in a bubble that is closing in on us”; small agency succession planning; relationships with city managers or mayors; the advancement of technology that demands more of law enforcement; and school safety.

Participants also highlighted what they feel are the most critical issues facing policing as a profession. These topics included the following:

- Community-police relations
- An overall lack of trust in the profession
- Mental health
- The negative media portrayal of policing

## DETROIT / ONTARIO

The eighth listening session was hosted by the Michigan State Police in Detroit, Michigan, on Tuesday, September 20, 2016. Attendance included roughly 70 law enforcement leaders from Michigan and Canada.

When discussing the issues most pressing to their agencies, participants echoed one another on many common themes, including:

- Recruitment of qualified candidates and retention
- Building and sustaining community relationships and trust
- Identifying leadership within the agency and creating an impactful legacy
- Mental health of both citizens whom the department interacts with and agency members who are impacted daily by traumatic events.

Participants also highlighted issues they believe are most pressing to the law enforcement profession at large. These issues include the national and international negative portrayal of law enforcement in the media, the pressure and unrealistic expectations for law enforcement to do more with less financial support and inadequate resources, and the need to diversify law enforcement to reflect the communities the agencies serve.

Additional concerns that were raised by both the Michigan representatives and the Canadian partners, included the increasing use of heroin and other opioids, economic and political impacts on communities and social services, and officer safety. The group presented ideas such as putting forward the positive work of law enforcement and celebrating the successes, leveraging the “silent majority,” and taking part in courageous conversations in order to strengthen and reframe the narrative and reputation of law enforcement.

## MOVING FORWARD

The issues identified through this listening tour will help drive and inform the actions and efforts of the IACP in the coming months and years. In some areas, we will be building upon existing IACP programs and projects to better serve the field, while in others we will look to advance new policies and priorities to better serve the profession. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- The IACP Institute for Community-Police Relations (ICPR) focuses on the role of police leadership in advancing progressive transformation within law enforcement agencies and works to identify and develop leading practices for building and enhancing trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.
- The IACP/University of Cincinnati Center for Police Research and Policy will engage in rigorous research that has practical implications for the field and is intended to serve as a national model for the way law enforcement agencies and researchers work together to help protect communities, safeguard citizens' rights, and ensure the fair treatment of all individuals.
- The IACP will work with organizations that represent municipal leadership to foster discussion and build a better understanding of both the capacities and realistic expectations of law enforcement agencies. The IACP will also work with other elements of the criminal justice system to identify and implement best practices that support transparency and promote community trust.
- The IACP will support the establishment of a national criminal justice commission to review and evaluate all components of the criminal justice system and make recommendations for comprehensive criminal justice reform.
- The Center for Advancing Law Enforcement Leadership and Culture will aim to develop and advance a law enforcement culture of trust, transparency, and accountability. This culture will be based upon a value system that embraces community wellness, public safety, and service.

In addition, these forums demonstrated the importance of this dialogue and the value it provides to the participants, the association and the profession. As a result, the IACP leadership is committed to continuing these sessions in the future and continuing this valuable dialogue and work, collectively, to meet new and emerging challenges, enhance trust in the profession and ensure the safety of law enforcement officers and the communities they serve.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND  
**PARTICIPATION**





**International Association of Chiefs of Police**

44 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 200

Alexandria, VA 22314

703.836.6767 • FAX 703.836.4743 • [www.theIACP.org](http://www.theIACP.org)

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