A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

The Need for a National Commission on Criminal Justice
THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL COMMISSION ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Commissions are frequently used at all levels of government to examine special issues or problems. They help draw attention to the issue under examination and their recommendations are commonly the source of new programs and initiatives to address the problem. There have been three Presidential Commissions that were directed to look at the problem of crime and the one that had the greatest impact was a commission established by President Lyndon Johnson.

History of Johnson Commission

In July 1965, President Lyndon Johnson issued an executive order establishing the Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. The commission and its recommendations marked the beginning of a sea change in our methods for dealing with crime and the public and built the framework for many of the exemplary programs that continue today.

The Commission’s work and primary report—The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society (1967)—and the 200 recommendations it produced marked the beginning of a sea change in our methods for dealing with crime and the public and built the framework for many of the highly effective law enforcement and public safety initiatives that have been in place for the last forty years. The report led to

- an emphasized importance of research—created NIJ/BJS/BJA;
- the creation of the 9-1-1 system;
- the development of the automated fingerprint identification systems;
- the creation the National Criminal Information Center (NCIC);
- the development of computer aided dispatch and vehicle location systems;
- improved training and technical assistance standards for law enforcement; and
- overall professionalization of law enforcement.

Our Society Has Changed Since the 1965 Commission

Forty-seven years have now passed since that commission completed its work and, clearly our society has changed significantly in that time. Policing practices and strategies are vastly different than they were in 1965, and these improvements were a direct result of the work of the President’s Commission. We are better, more professionalized, and smarter about how to combat crime and protect our nation’s streets, neighborhoods and schools. In 1965, there were approximately 420,000 law enforcement officers at the local, State and Federal level. Now, there are more than 18,000 agencies and more than 900,000 law enforcement officers.

Since the Johnson Commission of 1965, law enforcement agencies are more diverse, educational levels of police officers have significantly increased and both citizen oversight and community engagement are stronger. Law enforcement agencies are now
providing the first line of defense against threats to homeland security;
- adapting to changes in violent crime patterns;
- facing unsolved and complex immigration issues;
- witnessing increased illegal firearm trafficking and violence;
- fighting continued trafficking in human beings and illegal narcotics;
- incorporating new forensic capabilities and techniques; and
- witnessing new technological advances that have created entirely new kinds of electronic-based cybercrimes like identity theft, fraud and malicious computer hacking, which has changed the way both criminals and law enforcement operate.

And just in the last decade, since the events of September 11, 2001, the traditional role of law enforcement has been fundamentally altered and a new era of policing in the United States has emerged. In the aftermath of these attacks law enforcement agencies realized that they now had a new and critically important mission. No longer could they focus their energies solely on traditional crime-fighting efforts. Now they would be asked to confront a new threat to their communities, perpetrated by individuals and organizations that had motivations and means of attack vastly different from those of traditional criminals. Accepting this challenge required law enforcement and other public safety agencies to reassess their operations and reevaluate their priorities.

Over the last 10 years, a number of dramatic steps have been taken to confront the menace of terrorism, including the passage of the Patriot Act, the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, and the creation of a variety of programs designed to assist states and local governments in their efforts.

**The Need for a New Commission**

Unfortunately, despite these valuable initiatives, state, tribal, and local law enforcement executives have grown increasingly concerned with the lack of a central, comprehensive plan to guide our national efforts to adjust to the realities of the post 9/11 world. This fractured approach has sown confusion among public safety agencies; delayed progress; resulted in the waste of limited resources; and, in the end, left the United States far less secure than it needs to be. We cannot allow this to continue.

At the same time, the law enforcement community’s traditional crime-fighting efforts have suffered. Already tight state, county, municipal, and tribal budgets have been forced to absorb the costs associated with increased training needs, overtime, and equipment purchases.

Coupled with these pressures is the continuing need to ensure the protection of civil rights and civil liberties, which is central to a strong community-police relationship and therefore vital to our crime-fighting and homeland security efforts.

It is for these stated reasons that the International Association of Chief of Police has made it a top priority to establish a national commission to conduct a comprehensive review of the
criminal justice system and to provide the nation with a strategic plan that will guide an integrated public safety and homeland security effort in the years ahead.

The United States needs a new commission that embraces the same mission as the 1965 Commission. We need a commission is tasked with conducting an examination of EVERY aspect of the nation’s criminal justice systems including, but not limited to the prevention of crime, law enforcement, corrections and offender re-entry.

The commission must have the opportunity to examine and develop recommendations addressing the broad range of new and emerging challenges that confront law enforcement today, from cybercrime to nontraditional organized crime and from violent street gangs to homeland security.

**The National Criminal Justice Commission Act**


S. 306 would allow for the creation of a commission that would follow in the footsteps of the 1965 Johnson Commission that would review the nation’s criminal justice system and offer concrete recommendations to address the public safety challenges confronting the United States.

It is important to note that S. 306 respects states’ rights. The commission’s recommendations would not be binding and no state, local, tribal or the federal government would be required to adopt any one of the commission’s recommendations. The legislation specifically states that the Commission should consider the financial and human resources of state and local governments and that their recommendations shall not infringe on the legitimate rights of the states to determine their own criminal laws or the enforcement of such laws.

Under S. 306, the commission would be comprised of 14 members split 7–7 on a bipartisan basis:

- 1 Co-Chair is appointed by the President
- 1 Co-Chair is appointed by Senate Republican Leadership
- 4 members are appointed by House/Senate Democrats
- 4 members are appointed by House/Senate Republicans
- 2 members (who must be state and locals) are appointed by the President only with the agreement of House/Senate Republicans.
- 2 members (who must be state and locals) are appointed by the President only with the agreement of House/Senate Democrats

**Conclusion**

Our country needs a strategic plan embracing the reality that protecting our communities depends on our ability to fight both crime and terrorism. It is the law enforcement community’s belief that establishing a national commission is the vital first step in this process.
For additional information on these issues, or other matters of concern to the law enforcement community, please contact the IACP Legislative Affairs staff:

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The International Association of Chiefs of Police is the world’s oldest and largest nonprofit membership organization of police executives, with more than 21,000 members in over 100 different countries. The IACP’s leadership consists of the operating chief executives of international, federal, state, tribal, and local agencies of all sizes.

Founded in 1893, the association’s goals are to advance the science and art of police services; to develop and disseminate improved administrative, technical and operational practices and promote their use in police work; to foster police cooperation and the exchange of information and experience among police administrators throughout the world; to bring about recruitment and training in the police profession of qualified persons; and to encourage adherence of all police officers to high professional standards of performance and conduct.

Since 1893, the International Association of Chiefs of Police has been serving the needs of the law enforcement community. Throughout the past 115 years, we have been launching historically acclaimed programs, conducting ground-breaking research, and providing exemplary programs and services to our membership across the globe.

Professionally recognized programs such as the FBI Identification Division and the Uniform Crime Records system can trace their origins back to the IACP. In fact, the IACP has been instrumental in forwarding breakthrough technologies and philosophies from the early years of our establishment to the present. From spearheading national use of fingerprint identification to partnering in a consortium on community policing to gathering top experts in criminal justice, the government and education for summits on violence, homicide, and youth violence, the IACP has realized our responsibility to positively affect the goals of law enforcement.

Even with such an esteemed history, we are continually initiating programs to address the needs of today’s law enforcement professionals. Our members have let us know that they consider the IACP to be a progressive organization, successfully advancing the law enforcement profession.

If you would like additional information about the IACP, please contact IACP Headquarters at 1-800-THE-IACP (1-800-843-4227) or visit our website at www.theiacp.org.