

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

National Community Policing Week

President Obama designated the week of October 2 through October 8, 2016, as National Community Policing Week. As the President explained in his written proclamation, police officers are essential to keeping us safe, and on a daily basis they put their lives at risk to do so. The overwhelming majority of officers are fair, dedicated, and honest public servants who feel duty-bound to pursue a career in which they are on the front lines of protecting the community. But police officers cannot solve public safety issues alone. To be effective, police departments need to build and maintain positive relationships with the communities they serve. National Community Policing Week was intended to reaffirm our nation's commitment to support community policing and build bonds between police and the community.

Attorney General Loretta Lynch has made community policing a top Department of Justice priority, and a top personal priority. As she has written, "Community policing is a public safety philosophy based on partnership and cooperation. At its core is the idea that everyone has a stake in the safety of the neighborhoods where we live and work, and that none of us, police or citizen, can make them safe on our own." In her time as Attorney General, she has traveled around the country to different localities to highlight successful community policing efforts, including a citizen's academy in Birmingham, Alabama meant to help young residents understand the danger police officers face in their jobs; the presence of police officers in classrooms in Cincinnati, Ohio, to serve as tutors, mentors, and peacemakers; and, a community anti-violence program in Portland, Oregon. In our District, we are fortunate to have local law enforcement leaders who are committed to community policing and who are engaging in similar efforts throughout our communities.

During National Community Policing Week, the Attorney General asked that each U.S. Attorney's Office and federal law enforcement agency hold an event to support community policing. Around the country, there were countless events ranging from members of the public joining individual officers for a "cup of coffee with a cop," to neighborhood walks, to announcements of federal grants to support local community policing programs.

In our district, we hosted federal and local law enforcement partners, including Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert, Sacramento Police Chief Sam Somers, and representatives of the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office and the FBI in a presentation to community leaders explaining the official review processes that occur following an officer-involved shooting. Such shootings, particularly those which involve citizens of color, have generated intense public discussion and critical scrutiny across the country. As we have seen in recent months, officer-involved shootings can have a dramatic impact on the local community, and whether the authorities' review of such a shooting is fair—and is perceived to be fair—can substantially affect the trust that exists between the community and the law enforcement agencies that protect it. It was our hope that by presenting information on how the review process worked, we could help community leaders understand the reasoning behind it,

dispel any misconceptions about official handling of police shooting incidents, and potentially generate understanding and support of law enforcement agencies' efforts in this area.

We chose to make our presentation to the Greater Sacramento Area Hate Crimes Task Force, a group of community leaders and Sacramento area law enforcement executives who have met regularly for years, usually in my office, to discuss how to combat hate crimes and discrimination in our community. The task force's meetings have served to advance public safety over the years by increasing the level of communication and understanding between law enforcement and the community we serve and by encouraging the reporting of hate crimes. To me, it was only natural to rely on the task force to provide a forum of engagement between law enforcement leaders and community leaders on the vital issue of officer-involved shooting reviews.

At the meeting, which was one of the most heavily attended of the task force's meetings since I have been in the office, community leaders heard about the procedures followed by the Sacramento Police Department, the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office, and the Sacramento District Attorney's Office, as well as the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's Office, following an officer-involved shooting. Generally, if the shooting involves the Police Department or the Sheriff's Office, there are multiple investigations by different offices of that agency that occur with emphasis on criminal, administrative, and accountability perspectives. There are policies and procedures that govern whether the officer involved is permitted to continue working, in particular capacities, pending the outcome of such investigations. The District Attorney's Office independently reviews the results of criminal investigations to determine whether prosecution is appropriate. Federal involvement by the FBI and my office takes different forms based on the circumstances involved, from monitoring, to assistance with the local investigations, to active federal investigation.

One underlying message from the speakers was that each agency took officer-involved shootings seriously and approached them from multiple investigative angles. A healthy question/answer and comment session followed, with community leaders voicing perspectives that the law enforcement representatives found extremely valuable. One community member commented on the benefits of maximizing transparency in the process to gain public support for the process. Another expressed concern for the emotional health of police officers whose jobs expose them daily to pressurized situations. Several questions involved the training that police officers receive, particularly in how to handle situations that might require a quick judgment whether force is required or whether tensions might be defused without resort to force.

I spoke with a number of the participants after the meeting and received positive comments from both the law enforcement representatives and the community leaders. In the end, it was no surprise to me that the task force, whose history was to provide a forum for law enforcement and community leaders to work together to address hate crimes, succeeded in creating an environment for a constructive discussion involving the critical subject of officer-involved shootings. It is my hope that our National Community Policing Week event advanced the ultimate goal of bringing law enforcement and the community closer together in working to making our district a safer place.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

Acting United States Attorney

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