



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

**HUGH T. CLEMENTS, JR.
DIRECTOR**

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED
“OVERSIGHT OF THE COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING
SERVICES (COPS) GRANT PROGRAM”**

**PRESENTED
APRIL 10, 2024**

**STATEMENT OF
HUGH T. CLEMENTS, JR.
DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED
“OVERSIGHT OF THE COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING
SERVICES (COPS) GRANT PROGRAM”**

**PRESENTED
APRIL 10, 2024**

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the oversight of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services – better known as the COPS Office. The mission of the COPS Office is to advance public safety through community policing, focusing on collaborative efforts to prevent and respond to crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. The COPS Office has added community policing officers to the nation’s streets, enhanced crime fighting technology, supported crime prevention initiatives, and provided training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. To date, the COPS Office has provided grants to more than 13,000 state, local, and Tribal law enforcement agencies to reduce crime by advancing community policing. In all, COPS Office funding has supported the hiring of more than 138,000 law enforcement positions from the Orlando County Sheriff’s Department, to the Michigan State Police, to the Nevada System of Higher Education, and everything in between.

Over its nearly thirty-year history, the COPS Office has received bipartisan support as its annual funding enables it to implement priorities of the Attorney General and Congress, and incentivize the law enforcement field to align with the mission to advance the practice of community policing. The COPS Office provides comprehensive resources to advance public safety and strengthen relations between law enforcement and the community. The COPS Office is not only a grant-making component but also provides resources and assistance to help communities find the most promising practices to adapt for their local conditions and capacities.

The COPS Hiring Program (CHP) is designed to reduce crime and advance public safety through community policing by providing direct support to state, local, and Tribal law enforcement agencies nationwide. CHP funding supports the hiring of career law enforcement officers to increase an agency's community policing capacity and crime prevention efforts. Almost thirty years after the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was signed into law, the COPS Office continues to support the efforts of law enforcement agencies across the country as they develop creative and innovative ways to deal with long-standing public safety issues.

CHP is the COPS Office's flagship program and has a long history of promoting police-community partnerships for the express purpose of crime reduction through effective community policing. Through CHP, the COPS Office is supporting our nation's front-line heroes by providing them with needed resources and expertise to enhance local community policing strategies and tactics. The COPS Office requires hiring grant applicants to submit a comprehensive community policing plan outlining their current commitment to community policing and how they plan to advance their efforts through additional funding; asks applicants to specify public safety issues that they will target with hiring funding; and provides technical

assistance on specific challenges identified by grantees, such as Gun Violence, Building Legitimacy and Trust, Combating Hate and Domestic Extremism, and improving Police-Based Response to Persons in Crisis.

The COPS Office Community Policing Development (CPD) funds are used to develop the capacity of law enforcement to implement community policing strategies by providing guidance on promising practices through the development and testing of innovative strategies; building knowledge about effective practices and outcomes; and supporting new, creative approaches to preventing crime and promoting safe communities. CPD funding supports projects that develop knowledge, increase awareness of effective community policing strategies, augment the skills and abilities of law enforcement and community partners, expand the number of law enforcement agencies and relevant stakeholders using proven community policing practices, and institutionalize community policing practice in routine business. Topical areas under our CPD funding includes law enforcement accreditation, de-escalation training, expansion of crisis intervention teams, and microgrants to fund innovative projects at the local level.

In addition to the COPS Hiring Program and Community Policing Development, we provide grants for a range of programs including law enforcement mental health and wellness, anti-methamphetamine and anti-heroin task forces, school safety measures, active shooter training, and our Tribal resources grant program – most of which are now open or are about to open for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 grant application cycle.

The COPS Office incentivizes commonsense reforms by providing priority funding consideration, where appropriate, for agencies and initiatives aligned with Section 20 of Executive Order 14074, Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice

Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety. Beyond Section 20, we are coordinating and supporting several sections of Executive Order 14074, and have actively worked with other components in the Department to develop and implement these actions.

We also prioritize applications for jurisdictions that support Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs, that seek to hire officers that would engage directly with CVI teams and other community stakeholders to ensure those groups are involved in strategic operations and planning, and that seek to implement hiring practices to help agencies mirror the racial diversity of the communities that they serve.

The COPS Office is committed to monitoring grant award recipients to assure fidelity to the taxpayer dollar. Each grant awarded by the COPS Office requires quarterly federal financial and semi-annual performance progress reports from award recipients. The COPS Office reviews these reports in concert with the submitted application on an annual and on-going basis during routine monitoring. This allows the Office a means of oversight and early detection in which to troubleshoot any potential compliance concerns and provide guidance and technical assistance, when needed, to assist award recipients with the successful implementation of their projects to improve performance results and outcomes. Grantees are also required to certify the information provided in their progress and financial reports and are monitored accordingly.

The COPS Office had approximately \$1.34 billion in active awards during FY 2023. The COPS Office conducts routine monitoring of 100 percent of our active grant funding. We also conduct enhanced monitoring, including either on-site or through enhanced office-based reviews, on no less than 10 percent of the active award funding amount each fiscal year determined by a risk-based assessment of each award recipient. In FY 2023, COPS performed enhanced

monitoring on 121 awards to 87 award recipient agencies, for a total of \$139.2 million – an amount which exceeded the required 10% level by approximately \$5 million.

Beyond our traditional grants, we have a variety of technical assistance resources. In 2011, the Department created the Collaborative Reform Initiative for police departments seeking proactive technical assistance with reforms, organizational efficiencies, and enhancement of community engagements. At a law enforcement agency's request, COPS examines key operational areas – including training, internal investigations, accountability mechanisms, use of force, and racial profiling – and provides recommendations for reforms that will enhance public safety and public trust.

The program has evolved over time, and the Collaborative Reform Initiative continuum of services now encompasses three programs offering law enforcement agencies expert services ranging in scope and complexity. The continuum of services is designed to build trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve; improve operational efficiencies; enhance officer safety and wellness; and develop and disseminate evidence-based, promising, and innovative public safety practices.

The programs that make up the continuum include Organizational Assessments, which represent the most comprehensive form of technical assistance through the development of recommendations, findings, and the provision of accompanying technical assistance; Critical Response, which provides data analyses, policy assessments, and after-action reviews and the immediate delivery of technical assistance to agencies experiencing issues of critical need; and the Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center, which provides “by the field, for the field” technical assistance on a wide range of topics to requesting agencies. To date, we

have worked with over 1,150 departments across these three tailored approaches to assist with reforming law enforcement agencies. As we speak, we are working with over 60 agencies.

A COPS Office resource that continues to grow in popularity and usage is our online Training Portal, which provides a convenient way for law enforcement professionals and community partners to access interactive online training in emerging public safety topics. Additionally, the Portal serves as a gateway to a variety of multimedia community policing resources at no cost. As of now, we have 48,000 registered users who have enrolled in our 45 trainings and resources nearly 100,000 times, and we continue to add new courses to reach new learners and re-engage with existing users. Most recently, we have added courses on responding to mental health crises, including those involving youth and veterans, and missing and murdered indigenous persons cases. The Portal team is constantly working to upgrade the user experience and accessibility of the Portal, ensuring that it can continue to provide cost-effective training that is useful to agencies large and small, and is being utilized by agencies across the country to provide high quality, engaging learning opportunities on a variety of topics.

As I mentioned, our work goes beyond that of a grant making agency. We produce a number of knowledge resource products and reports. One in particular that I want to focus on today is the COPS Office's published report produced in the wake of tragedy, and that is *Considerations for Specialized Units*. The COPS Office partnered with the National Policing Institute on this topic following the Tyre Nichols killing, and it includes guidance on how to balance the need for specialized units with the oversight they require. It emphasizes the need to work closely with the community on these units to maintain community trust.

The guide looks at four main stages of specialized units: (1) formation, (2) personnel selection and supervision, (3) management and accountability, and (4) community engagement.

Each section of the guide offers key considerations for agencies as they are creating or reviewing their own specialized units. We received great input from the field for this publication and we believe agencies and communities alike will find it is an important tool.

I also want to highlight the recent Department of Justice report, *Critical Incident Review: Active Shooter at Robb Elementary School*. The report examines the multiple failures in response to that horrific tragedy, including the breakdowns in leadership, decision-making, tactics, policy, and training that contributed to those failures. It begins with a minute-by-minute timeline reconstructing key events before, during, and immediately following the shooting. The report addresses many previously unanswered questions, builds on the existing knowledge base for responding to incidents of mass violence, and identifies generally accepted practices for effective law enforcement responses. Our goal with the report was to honor the victims and survivors of this tragedy, as well as offer recommendations to improve future responses in other communities.

In addition to laying out the facts, as well as a wealth of recommendations – we do not just release a report like that and walk away. We remain committed to working with those in the Uvalde community and surrounding region on solutions to the issues, challenges, and deficiencies the report identified. We are bringing our training and technical assistance resources to bear on topics like active shooter response, leadership, planning, coordination with other agencies, building community trust, and more to help them improve, which we are able to do through the Collaborative Reform Initiative that I mentioned earlier. While these after-action reports are vitally important in terms of providing the authoritative account of what actually happened, it is also critically important to look at what went wrong in order to build a better plan for the future.

Reviews such as this can be tremendously helpful to both law enforcement agencies and communities, as they work together to see how they can improve policies, procedures, systems, and – most importantly – relationships. We already know from the feedback we have received that this is a very important resource for agencies across the country. And it is my hope that lives will be saved because of the agencies that will study this report and implement the recommendations.

Before closing, I do want to underscore that beyond our work in the grant space, our efforts with the specialized units report and in Uvalde are just two examples of how the COPS Office can impact communities around the country with our reach, expertise, and power to convene. Helping law enforcement to advance community policing practices is at the core of everything we do at the COPS Office – whether that is in the program development phase of a new grant, monitoring existing awards, or providing new training – our mission is and remains the advancement of public safety through community policing.

Thank you again for this opportunity to address the Committee, and I look forward to answering your questions.