



**USCM Working Group on Police Reform and Racial Justice  
Seizing this Moment  
Statement of Principles  
June 25, 2020**

As mayors and police chiefs from cities across the nation, sharing the duty to protect every member of the public, determine police department policies, set budgetary priorities and negotiate labor agreements, we have the frontline responsibility for recasting the relationship between our police departments and the communities we serve.

The public response in the aftermath of the videotaped George Floyd killing has rekindled and intensified the national call for police reform and an honest dialogue on systemic racism and its impact on communities of color. The Police Reform and Racial Justice Working Group is charged with producing, advancing, and enacting meaningful reforms that mayors and police chiefs across the country can adopt to address, deter, and remediate police violence and patterns of racial discrimination. Today, we set out the principles to which we are committed and that will shape our work.

In the next month, we will announce a police reform framework, outlining specific recommendations based upon the principles set forth below. This framework will be rooted in the goal of advancing policing practices that respect and protect human life and ensure safety for all. It will take account of both the urgent need to address racially-biased practices and concerns that there are public functions that have, for far too long, fallen to police departments by default but which can be better addressed by others.

Mayors and police leaders must meet this moment. Although there is no singular response that addresses the needs of every municipality or police department, there are core principles upon which we can build a new approach and that will frame our work. We know that now is the time to renew the compact between people and the police, to restore trust and accountability, to rebuild legitimacy and to reimagine policing in our country.

**Principles**

A set of principles for policing, attributed to Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel in England, is often cited as the foundational framework for modern policing in a democracy. They stand for the ideas that the police exist to prevent crime and that the legitimacy of the police derives from public consent and trust. Peel's Principles state that policing must be based upon a reciprocal relationship of trust between the police and the public.

This moment calls for a reaffirmation of these principles of policing. Our work will be framed by the following updated principles which will guide the Working Group's recommendations:

- **Redefining the Role of Local Police and Public Safety.** The current moment calls into question, but also provides a unique opportunity to discuss, the first principles of policing and requires a community conversation on the proper role of police in addressing the needs of residents. Building healthy, safe and vibrant communities requires many other tools than law enforcement alone. We must reset the compact between police and communities they are sworn to protect. This should begin with a hard but essential dialogue defining the proper role of the police. We need to ask, "Who is best equipped to be the first responder in addressing a long list of calls for service?" The reflexive answer cannot be "the police." When the government has no presence in communities in a healthy and supportive way, the primary governmental actor that people see and identify are the police. In the absence of appropriate levels of funding for things like mental health care; affordable, high quality health care; accessible housing; healthy food options; good paying jobs; quality and safe education options; and other social services, the police are consistently thrust into a role of addressing these various social issues – a role for which they were not created and for which they will never be properly equipped. We must meet community needs with proper funding and investments and avoid inserting the police into roles in which they must be the primary or only public response. If we ask too much of the police, and not enough of ourselves, our residents will always get too little.
- **Trust and Legitimacy.** Public approval and acceptance are the basis of effective policing. The public and police must find common ground on which to trust each other. Police must earn their community's trust and cooperation, and, in turn, the public must respect officers as faithful guardians of the community who both follow and enforce the law. This requires those who enforce the law to be accountable for adhering to it. Unintentional mistakes are not the same as intentional misconduct, but when police cross the line of established policy or legally permissible conduct, they must be held accountable in order to have legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Effective policing requires the police and members of the community to develop constructive and respectful ways of interacting with each other. The principles of community policing are critical to this process. The well of good will must be built and filled daily and long before a crisis hits. These principles of trust and legitimacy must also permeate the decisions about supervisor selection, especially the front-line supervisors who are in most frequent contact with officers on a daily basis. Thus, the criteria for supervisor selection, training and accountability are essential elements of defining the culture of a department. Supervisors must be held accountable for reinforcing the core values of the department in the discharge of their daily responsibilities.
- **Sanctity of Life.** At the core of a police officer's responsibilities is the duty to protect all human life and physical safety. To ingrain this fundamental principle, use of force policies must clearly state this requirement, with specificity, and require officers to intervene when a fellow officer is using disproportionate or unnecessary force. As is often stated, just because one can use force, does not mean that it should be used. It is critical that we ensure that officers are properly trained to value the sanctity of life and only use the minimum amount of force necessary, if any, to accomplish lawful objectives. Officers must have the tools and judgment to differentiate circumstances that do not warrant the use of force. Use of force policies and training must also include, but not be

limited to: bans on chokeholds or any other carotid restraints; de-escalation and critical incident training; peer intervention to prevent misconduct; bans on shooting at moving vehicles except under extreme circumstances where a life is at risk; limitations on car pursuits to avoid death or great bodily harm; and defined parameters for foot pursuits, among other things.

- **Equality and Due Process.** Police conduct must not vary on account of race, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or other status. Every person is entitled to equal treatment, respect for his or her constitutional rights and due process of law. Fairness, respect and professionalism enhance public safety as they enhance public support and cooperation. We are mindful that the history of policing in many places has been interwoven with the nation's history of racial discrimination, including efforts to use police forces to ratify and maintain segregation and other forms of racism. To ensure equal and just treatment of all persons, departments must provide consistent training on impartial policing, anti-discrimination principles, and cultural literacy. Members of the community must be included as teachers in the training process and given an opportunity to assist in curriculum development so that a community perspective is part of the mandatory training for all recruits and veteran officers. Departments must also do more to ensure that in recruitment, promotion and retention decisions, diversity matters.
- **Community.** Departments must strive for a sincere belief among officers that respectful, constitutional engagement with the community is the most powerful tool they possess, over and above a gun and a badge. Police officers must be regarded as guardians and part of the community they serve and work to support and engage with those communities to effectively discharge their public safety mission. We should support police outreach initiatives and more broadly consider how to address the needs of youth, people with mental illness, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, people from various faith traditions and others who come into contact with law enforcement. Police departments' hiring, retention and promotion practices should strive to be more representative of the populations they serve. Departments must also incentivize officers to live in the communities they serve and to otherwise spend time building real, authentic relationships with members of the community, especially youth.
- **Transparency and Accountability to Reinforce Constitutional Policing.** True police reform will not come about through improved policies and training alone. We must ensure that police fulfill their commitments to protect the residents they serve and that police build trust and legitimacy through transparency, engagement and accountability. Police must play a role that reinforces democratic principles in our society. To ensure public awareness and reassure the public that officers are working to protect the community, departments should make their policies publicly available and, consistent with relevant laws and agreements, provide access to law enforcement data and findings of officer misconduct. Technology that can enhance accountability—such as body cameras and early warning systems—should be utilized. Cities should adopt uniform policies for the prompt release of video, audio and initial police reports on all matters of public interest, including specifically those arising from police-involved shootings, deaths in custody, or allegations of First Amendment violations. The collective bargaining agreements between cities and their police departments should provide fair, sensible and workable accountability mechanisms and eliminate any provisions that are roadblocks to addressing conduct that is inconsistent with the policies and laws that

govern our officers. Police unions must engage with good will as well and participate in these urgent reform, work with cities as partners — not obstructionists — on accountability and transparency and other reforms so that we can create stronger police departments that are truly responsive to the needs of residents and establish better police-community relations that serve both communities and officers. Cities should also work to eliminate any state laws that impede the implementation of sensible accountability measures across police departments. Transparency and more robust accountability mechanisms are necessary to improve police-community relations.

### **Looking Forward**

Today, we share these animating principles. Over the coming weeks, we will work to put forth a full set of recommendations and proposals that can be implemented nationwide and that will reassure our communities that there is a concrete path forward for the future.