

Dear Commissioners,

This is a letter of my testimony to the Commission relevant to the current state of relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve, and potential steps that can be taken to enhance these relationships.

I have been a police officer with the city of Portsmouth for 25 years and since the beginning of my career to the present our department has always put an emphasis on community policing. The Portsmouth Police Department has always been a leader in policing across the state. Our department has developed a working relationship with our community by being open and transparent.

Our officers have gained the support of our community by not only having positive engagements with our citizens, visitors and businesses, but also by becoming integrated in the fabric of our community. Our officers are involved in our city by instructing classes with businesses, schools and citizens, and also providing a citizens police academy. They coach youth and school sports, participate in the Special Olympics, and actively participate in community events.

Portsmouth has flourished as a beautiful seacoast community attracting people not only from the state but from around the world as a tourist destination. People come not only for its rich history but because of its diverse offerings and the quality of life which is offered here in our city due to its safety, and the comfort provided.

I believe the Portsmouth Police Department could be used as a model across the state to help other departments enhance their relationships with their communities. Developing a partnership with our community and gaining our communities support has allowed us to have the support needed to create an operating budget that allows our department to always be on the leading edge, gain CALEA advanced accreditation, train our officers properly and most importantly provide us with the personnel to do our jobs effectively.

To be an effective police department you must be able to engage with your community and understand their needs and request. This comes by providing pro-active policing and engaging your community in good times, collaborating and developing positive relationships so when people are in need and under stress they are comforted by our appearance and not in fear. Our department has developed these bonds by hiring the right people, having officers who care about their community, and having officers who truly are in this profession because they want to help people.

Our department or any department across the country is only as strong as their weakest link, we work tirelessly to try and choose the best officers. We can now see across the nation a few bad examples can set the community, the department and the country back from all the hard work we've been trying to accomplish.

My advice to the commission to enhance these relationships between law enforcement and their communities while working on reforms is to offer a broad scope and not try to be too restrictive in your proposals. Each and every community across our state is different and what works in Portsmouth which is one of the more affluent communities across the state may not work in the north country of the state where it's less densely populated, and they may not have the ability to provide the funding or resources to offer the same programs and outreach Portsmouth is capable of offering.

Across the country there are discussions of defunding police departments, I can't stress enough the adversarial effects this would have on law enforcement and would only make our jobs more difficult by reducing our ability to do our jobs with less resources as we deal with more issues involving people with mental health and addiction issues. We understand there are issues with the current criminal justice system and these are issues that we cannot arrest our way out of. There needs to be more collaboration to work on a ways to send people to treatment and not jail, but until there's a system in place to allow that and the infrastructure in place with social workers and healthcare providers police officers are still going to be responding to calls dealing with people in crisis or need.

In closing I believe building partnerships in our communities between law enforcement, residents, schools, religious leaders, the business community and healthcare providers will build trust and transparency which will effectively allow systematic change and help create well thought out legislative changes and reform.

Thank you for your time.

Mark Newport

Captain Portsmouth Police Department