



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
145 N Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20530

COPS

Dear Colleagues:

As we celebrate Black History Month this year, we also mark the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As the first African-American director of the COPS Office, I can personally appreciate the advancements that both our society and this profession have made in terms of racial and ethnic equality in the last half-century. As a black man and father of a 16 year old son of color, I know there is much more to be done. This month is the ideal time for our profession to reflect on both our past accomplishments and failures with regards to civil rights.

Quite often, in order to move forward we must begin by looking backward, and in the realm of civil rights this is particularly important. By remaining cognizant of the role law enforcement played in enforcing discriminatory laws that were designed to oppress racial and ethnic minorities, we can better understand how significant generational mistrust of the police influences modern relationships between law enforcement and communities of color. From this acknowledgement, law enforcement can begin to move forward together with the community and strengthen these historically troubled relationships.

Last August, the Attorney General launched the “Smart on Crime” Initiative that includes efforts to reform the criminal justice system so as to make it, “smarter, fairer, and more effective.” On the anniversary of the March on Washington he noted that this reform effort, “will usher in a more equitable and effective criminal justice system...and help us to ensure the safety of our neighborhoods, to forge a more just society, and to continue building the more perfect Union that remains our common pursuit.” While this represents a commitment to the future on the part of the Federal government, I also encourage a similar commitment be made at the local level. As the most visible arm of government in a community, local law enforcement officers and leaders play a key role in addressing systemic inequality in the criminal justice system.

Law enforcement officers are, by the very nature of their work, empowered to limit the rights of individuals to protect our communities. But they also have the responsibility to protect those same rights, as well as the ability to be the strongest advocates for constitutional practices that ensure equality under the law. More than four decades ago, Professor Jerome H. Skolnick published *Justice Without Trial*. Professor Skolnick stated, “order achieved through democratic policing is concerned not only with the ends of crime control, but also with the means used to achieve those ends.”

Community policing is just such a means to be used in a democratic society as it is built on a foundation of trust. Thus, the COPS Office is committed to promoting promising practices to assist the field in building relationships based on mutual understanding, respect, and trust. I hope that all of you will commit to joining us in this effort so that everyone—especially our young men and boys of color who have and continue to experience systematic inequities in our criminal justice system and society—can enjoy safe and just communities for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Ronald L. Davis
Director