



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

COPS★

Dear colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to write to you about Hispanic Heritage Month, which starts September 15, the independence day of five Latin American countries, and ends October 15, shortly after Columbus Day.

Hispanic Heritage Month celebrates our centuries-old Spanish heritage and the impact that Americans of Spanish descent—people of all races and many national origins—have had on our country. Since the first Spanish Settlement in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565, Hispanic Americans have played a huge role in shaping our nation, enriching our culture, and making major contributions in government, business, sports, and entertainment

Today, Hispanic Americans number more than 50 million people, accounting for about 17% of our population. Among the best known of these citizens are Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, musician Joan Baez, and labor leader Cesar Chavez. But there are millions of other Latino and Hispanic Americans who add immeasurably to our national and individual well-being as friends, colleagues, and neighbors.

But this celebration is especially important to me for another reason. During my eight years as police chief in East Palo Alto, California, I forged strong relationships and friendships with the local community, which was about two-thirds Hispanic.

Most of these residents were recent immigrants whose language and cultural differences presented special challenges for law enforcement. In addition to being more vulnerable to crime, they were less likely to report it, usually out of fear and lack of strong English language skills. So our department worked diligently to establish trust and good communications. The payoff was a huge reduction in violent crime and an even greater increase in community trust.

We've also partnered with the Vera Institute of Justice to promote innovative, effective strategies for overcoming language and cultural barriers with focus groups, presentations, and reports, such as the "[Engaging Police in Immigrant Communities: Promising Practices from the Field](#)" publication.

Other COPS Office / Vera Institute publications that can be of great help in building positive community-law enforcement relationships are "[Policing in New Immigrant Communities](#)," "[Bridging the Language Divide: Promising Practices for Law Enforcement](#)," "[Building Strong Police-Immigrant Community Relations: Lessons from a New York City Project](#)," and "[Overcoming Language Barriers: Solutions for Law Enforcement](#)." We also provide [Gang Reference Cards for Parents in Spanish](#) and other languages.

I am pleased to say that even as the flow of new immigrants continues, law enforcement agencies throughout the country are making progress in improving the safety of their communities. But our work is far from done.

One step in the right direction would be incorporating community policing practices in all law enforcement activities. Another would be for all of us to celebrate the positive contributions different ethnic and racial groups have made to our society, beginning now with Hispanic Heritage Month.



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These four weeks are an excellent time to consider the richness of our cultural tapestry, the vibrancy that those of Spanish descent have contributed to it, and the benefits we all enjoy from our Hispanic heritage. Please join me in honoring the heritage and contributions of our Hispanic Americans. Gracias!

Sincerely,

Ronald L. Davis, Director
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services