



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

**COPS** ★

Did you know that just 7% of active duty Marines are women? I had the distinct honor of being the father of one of them for four years. I've also had a front row seat to observe and support my wife in her rise from a police officer to a police chief over a 28 year law enforcement career. Her journey, however, was not without its struggles for equality and fair opportunity. Their experiences, and the opportunities I wish for my 12 year old daughter, have made me think about the challenges women face in traditionally male-dominated professions, as well as about the importance of diversity in the workplace. As we celebrate Women's History Month this March, we should recognize both the advances women have made and the challenges they still face in achieving equity in the workplace.

Women have long served in civilian positions in police departments and today make up 60% of the law enforcement civilian workforce. But while the first women to hold sworn positions date to a little over 100 years ago, according to the 2012 FBI UCR women make up just 12% of sworn officers. As someone who believes that a diverse workforce is a strong workforce, this gives me pause and makes me ask the question: why?

We know women have and are making outstanding contributions to the policing profession. This is not surprising as there is a tremendous amount of research out there that documents the benefits of diverse workforces to productivity and profitability. Diverse experiences, backgrounds, and qualifications are touted as key to innovation and effective problem-solving. We also know that when any organization systematically recruits from a diverse set of potential employees, they become much more likely to be able to hire the best and the brightest available in the labor market. Yet we struggle to attract more women to policing.

As we at the COPS Office work to advance the practice of community policing across this country we recognize the importance of law enforcement agencies being a reflection of the community that they serve. While we most often make this point in terms of race and ethnicity, we should include gender as well. I also think it needs to apply not just to the number of women in any given agency, but to the different assignments and opportunities within them.

As we talk about hiring the next generation of officers and training the future leaders of this profession, we need to remember that diverse perspectives and views in fact improve our decision-making abilities and our responsiveness to the community. If we strive to hire in the spirit of service, embrace the individuality of our officers, and ensure equal opportunity in assignments and promotions, we will build stronger agencies.

We should not be satisfied with the diversity we currently have as being good enough. As we strive to recruit more women into policing we must remember that our actions — how women are treated and the opportunities they are provided within the agency — are more powerful recruitment messages than any recruitment slogan. Ensuring our police agencies are strong, diverse, and provide equal opportunities to all of its employees goes to the heart of procedural justice both in and out of the organization. And should my youngest daughter someday choose to follow in her parents' career footsteps, the only struggles she should face should be the same as her male peers — to learn the job and serve her community to the best of her ability — and not ones of struggle for equity and opportunity.

Sincerely,

Ronald L. Davis  
Director