The Task Force assessed over two dozen policies and developed 16 assessment briefs, ranging from de-escalation and procedural justice training to duty-to-intervene policies and internal police functions. After reviewing the best available research, the Task Force outlined five priorities for actionable change in policing.

**FIVE PRIORITIES**

+ **Develop National Training Standards**: American police training is too short, uses ineffective teaching methods, and spends too little time on de-escalation, communication skills, problem solving, and scenarios officers are most likely to encounter in the community. National standards are needed to ensure that all officers receive a strong foundation in the skills and concepts required to police equitably and compassionately.

+ **Establish a Federal Decertification Registry**: A federal decertification database can enhance police accountability and ensure that officers who engage in misconduct do not perpetuate harm in other agencies and communities. The database should be coupled with state requirements that agencies comply with officer severance reporting rules and consult the database when making hiring decisions.

+ **Adopt Duty-to-Intervene and Mandatory Reporting Policies**: Duty-to-intervene and mandatory reporting policies are important accountability mechanisms that can prevent harm to community members, identify officers whose behavior may warrant intervention by superiors, and change "them against us" policing culture.

+ **Promote Trauma-Informed Policing**: Officers who are trained to identify and address trauma in the community, and who have a heightened awareness of their own exposure to stress and trauma and seek help as needed, are better equipped to police in an equitable and respectful manner.

+ **Increase Data Collection and Transparency**: Accessible, reliable data on the performance and impacts of law enforcement is critical to reform efforts – and sorely lacking. Federal leadership and incentives are needed to improve the collection and sharing of data on use of force and other police activities.
**Priority 1: Develop National Training Standards**

Police training, particularly instruction delivered to recruits, is an essential component of efforts to prevent excessive use of force, reduce racially biased policing, and build community trust in law enforcement. Along with clear written policies and engaged supervisors who model appropriate behavior and enforce accountability, training is crucial to prepare officers to police in a respectful, constitutional manner that prioritizes the preservation of life.

Despite its importance, training varies widely in content, duration, and delivery among the 18,000 law enforcement agencies across the country. Police training in the United States is relatively limited in duration, far shorter than what comparable democracies and professions require. More problematic is the content: it typically focuses on a militaristic warrior model, employs a stress-based approach, and emphasizes intensive physical demands, firearms proficiency, psychological pressure, and enforcement rather than trust building and problem solving.

The Task Force recommends that the federal government develop and promulgate national police training standards, using grant funding as leverage to incentivize states and localities to adopt them. The standards should reflect the challenges and requests for help that officers routinely encounter on the job today. That means far greater focus on communication and critical thinking skills, social interaction and de-escalation tactics, and principles of procedural justice. They also should teach officers how to engage in evidence-based problem-solving in collaboration with community members, de-emphasizing pretextual vehicle and pedestrian stops that too often are unnecessary and racially biased.

Given its relatively strong evidence of effectiveness, de-escalation should be a central component of police training, afforded equal weight to use-of-force training and fully integrated into all aspects of academy and in-service training curricula. Traditional police training typically instructs officers to use a continuum of force, increasing it as the level of threat rises. Employed by most American police academies, this approach fails to recognize the dynamic nature of police encounters with members of the public and predisposes officers to think in terms of increasing force rather than using strategies that could avoid it altogether.

De-escalation training is a better approach. When implemented with fidelity and complemented with strong supervisory and accountability mechanisms, such training can yield meaningful outcomes, with one field experiment finding that officers who completed de-escalation training were involved in 28% fewer uses of force, 26% fewer citizen complaints, and 36% fewer officer injuries than those who received no training.

Proactive de-escalation training shows officers how to defuse situations before force becomes necessary and equips them with tools to evaluate and respond to difficult, volatile, and potentially combative circumstances in real time. Critical components of de-escalation training include teaching officers how to remain calm, use verbal communication strategies, create physical distance between themselves and community members, and use critical thinking skills to pivot to other tactics in response to changing dynamics.

Such training also teaches officers how to recognize people experiencing mental health crises, enabling them to redirect individuals to non-law enforcement responders when needed. The national standards also should call for a resiliency-based curriculum, which teaches officers to recognize their own stress and manage their responses to it.
Fostering an equitable culture is critical to ensure that mandated training concepts are applied in the field. Field training should employ supervisory coaching, and officers should be subjected to periodic recertification that includes not just firearms training (as is customary today), but also communications skills, problem solving, de-escalation, and other core topics.

Coupled with sound recruitment and retention practices to attract and retain a diverse pool of applicants who are well suited for the job, national training standards would ensure that all officers, regardless of where they police or the size of their department, receive a common foundation in the concepts, skills, and tactics needed to provide just and effective public safety service.

**Priority 2: Establish a Federal Decertification Registry**

In debates surrounding police reform, the term “bad apple” features prominently. The argument that ridding agencies of a few wrongdoers will cure all that ails American policing is overly simplistic, failing to recognize the role that organizational culture and accountability mechanisms play. Nonetheless, the current patchwork of decertification policies across the country is alarming, allowing officers who engage in misconduct and violate the law to move down the road and pin on a new badge with impunity. Those who do are likely to cause more harm.

Most states have a process for revoking police officers’ certification when they are convicted of felonies or certain misdemeanors, or commit other forms of egregious or repeated misconduct. But far too often such officers remain on the job even after they have participated in misconduct that qualifies them for decertification. The explanation lies in the variations in decertification regimes by state and the absence of a comprehensive national decertification database that includes all decertified officers.

For example, all but one of the 46 state agencies with authority to decertify officers can or must do so for felony convictions, but about half require officers to be convicted of a crime before they are eligible for decertification. Most states can decertify officers for misdemeanor convictions (78%) and failure to meet training requirements (69%), while a smaller proportion may decertify for prior termination of employment for cause (46%) or misconduct (52%). Not surprisingly, the rate of decertification among states varies considerably. Some states decertify thousands of officers annually, while others take such action at a far lower rate.

States also differ on other crucial elements, such as the amount of time after which a decertified officer may reapply to become a sworn officer, the composition of hearing panels, and the consequences of resigning during a pending investigation. Moreover, some states allow any member of the public to file a complaint and trigger a decertification investigation, while others only begin the process when a law enforcement agency notifies the decertification entity that an officer is under review.

The result of this hodgepodge of decertification regimes is self-evident: some share of bad actors will resurface and resume their bad behavior. Officers who are rehired following police department separation are more likely than others to commit serious acts of misconduct. If their severance was for excessive force, research suggests they are more likely to use force again. Not only are these rehired officers likely to cause harm to community members, but they may also engender misconduct within their new peer networks.

A National Decertification Index currently exists, but participation across states and law enforcement agencies is uneven. Federal leadership is required. Consistent with the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act
(H.R. 1280), which passed in the U.S. House of Representatives on March 4, 2021, a national, federally-funded, and publicly accessible police misconduct registry should be established and should list officer misconduct investigations and their dispositions. Agencies should be encouraged to contribute records through a combination of federal funding incentives and mandatory state reporting laws. Decertification criteria should extend beyond criminal activity to include other types of misconduct, including sustained findings of excessive force, making false statements in a legal proceeding, falsification of evidence, acts of sexual misconduct, and domestic violence and abuse.

In some states, the establishment of a public registry will require lawmakers to rescind existing laws that prohibit disclosure of disciplinary findings. Other decertification changes that states should make include:

+ ensuring local agency compliance with reporting requirements;
+ requiring agencies to consult state and national police misconduct registries during hiring decisions;
+ closing the resignation loophole, which allows officers to avoid decertification when they resign in lieu of dismissal while an investigation is pending;
+ creating a presumption of decertification and prohibiting officers from law enforcement employment during the appeals process; and
+ enabling members of the public to submit a complaint to the state board independent of the local law enforcement agency, which should automatically trigger an investigation.

**Priority 3: Adopt Duty-To-Intervene and Mandatory Reporting Policies**

Far too many law enforcement agencies feature an organizational culture that discourages officers from speaking up when they see colleagues engage in inappropriate or illegal behavior. This “blue code of silence” is bred by cultures that engender a “them against us” perspective, and it may be exacerbated by the feeling among some officers that police are at extreme risk of harm and must stand together no matter what. The paramilitary structure and rigid hierarchy of police agencies further deter officers from calling out misconduct, particularly on the part of superiors. These dynamics lead to harms that could have been avoided and enable officers to engage in misconduct that goes undocumented with impunity.

To help remedy this long-standing problem, agencies should adopt policies that require officers to intervene upon witnessing excessive force committed by peers and supervisors and that hold accountable those who engage in such misconduct. The Task Force also recommends requiring officers to report other forms of misconduct on the part of their peers under mandatory reporting policies. While reducing excessive use of force is a key goal, mandatory reporting policies should apply to a wide array of other police behavior, including drinking on the job and other misconduct that could lead to future problems and may merit intervention.

Research shows that to be effective, mandatory intervention and reporting requirements – and the consequences for violating them – must be clearly articulated, widely disseminated, and faithfully enforced, and that whistleblowers must be protected. In addition, agencies should reinforce such policies by creating a departmental culture that is fair and equitable; research shows that officers are more likely to report wrongdoing on the part of their peers if they believe their department’s managerial practices are fair and just.
Such policies also should be reinforced through training to address negative stereotypes, racial biases, and power dynamics that help justify inaction on the part of bystanding officers. One training model designed to enforce compliance of duty-to-intervene policies, known as Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE), is based on a program implemented by the New Orleans Police Department as part of compliance with its federal consent decree. While such programs are promising, evaluation of their impact on outcomes such as misuse of force, police misconduct, racially disparate policing, and officer safety is needed.

Intervention also is more likely when it is encouraged and modeled by supervisors and peers. As such, publicly rewarding officers for intervening can prompt other officers to do so. In addition, recruiting and retaining a diverse pool of officers who are well positioned to take a guardian, rather than a warrior, approach to the job may further strengthen compliance with duty-to-intervene and mandatory reporting requirements. Equipping officers with body-worn cameras could hold more officers accountable for intervening, particularly if supervisor use of video footage for coaching and remedial purposes is a routine practice.

**Priority 4: Promote Trauma-Informed Policing**

Neighborhoods that suffer trauma from community violence can also experience disproportionate use of force by police. This trauma is particularly acute in Black and Brown communities and has roots in policing’s complicity in enforcing slavery and Jim Crow laws. That painful legacy, coupled with the persistence of racially-biased policing practices, spawns distrust between residents and officers that, if not acknowledged and addressed, perpetuates tensions and imposes barriers to collaboration on public safety.

Community trauma can manifest in many forms, including mental health challenges that make residents vulnerable to revictimization. Such trauma is inextricably linked to community violence, with studies finding that exposure to violence within interpersonal relationships and social networks increases the risk of both victimization and perpetration. Officers who are not trained to recognize trauma may cause more harm when interviewing victims of crime, including families of homicide victims, especially if they opt to use force and punitive measures when encountering people experiencing mental health crises.

Officers themselves are exposed to vicarious trauma that, if untreated, can compromise their ability to police effectively and equitably and increase the odds that they engage in violence. One survey conducted in an urban police department found that 60% of male officers and 46% of female officers had experienced five or more traumatic events in the past year alone, while 15% showed signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. Some research has shown that officers who are exposed to traumatic events may be more likely to engage in physical violence at home, suggesting that a trauma-informed approach to officer wellness could benefit officers, their families, and potentially community members. But departmental culture can discourage officers from seeking help, given perceptions that they will be viewed as weak, stigmatized, ridiculed, ignored by their department, or forced to face job-related consequences for disclosing mental health problems.

Promoting trauma-informed policing involves creating officer awareness and empathy of trauma in the community and encouraging officers to recognize their own exposure to trauma on the job. The approach is primarily designed to prevent officers interacting with people who are in crisis or have experienced trauma from taking actions that would re-traumatize them. Instead, officers are taught to recognize trauma, employ strategies to defuse the volatile behaviors that may accompany it and assist with referrals to community services and supports. Crisis Intervention Teams and co-responder models that train officers to identify and safely deal with people experiencing a mental health crisis have their roots in trauma-informed practice. Given
that roughly one in four people killed by police have mental health conditions, programs that train officers how
to effectively respond to people in crisis offer significant potential to save lives.

Trauma-informed policing also applies principles of de-escalation and procedural justice, and is complemented
by strategies to increase cultural understanding between officers and the communities they serve. Such
strategies include community-based listening sessions and reconciliation processes, which create
opportunities for police to acknowledge and address law enforcement's past harms, especially to Black people
and other marginalized populations (e.g., the LGBTQIA community). This approach involves excavating the
history of abusive policing practices toward people of color and examining more recent examples of biased
criminal justice practices. One dimension involves recognition by police that some residents may hold their own
implicit biases about officers based upon this history. Trauma-informed policing can build trust by connecting
officers with community members and enhancing law enforcement's awareness of their lived experience and
needs.

Despite their promise and logical appeal, trauma-informed policing models have not been rigorously evaluated.
While research has documented the ability of reconciliation processes to mend deep-seated wounds inflicted
by members of dominant groups on subjugated populations, no studies have identified the degree to which
they may reduce disparate policing practices. Strategies that combine principles of trauma-informed policing,
mental health awareness, de-escalation, procedural justice, officer wellness, and early intervention systems
should be developed and rigorously tested in the field.

**Priority 5: Increase Data Collection and Transparency**

This Task Force was established to review commonly proposed police reforms and weigh each measure's
relative value based on the best available research and the expertise and experience of members. Its
deliberations, however, have been clouded by a persistent problem: a woeful lack of data and research on police
activities and outcomes. The harm created by this shortage of reliable evidence extends beyond the limitations
it imposed on our ability to generate knowledge about what works. It also runs counter to principles of
transparency and accountability that are essential to a democratic society.

When it comes to the performance and impacts of law enforcement, metrics are incomplete at best and
undocumented at worst. Understanding the contours, precipitators, and contexts surrounding police use of
force and its racially disparate impacts are two urgent areas that require more and better data. Just as
importantly, democratizing such data is critical to enhancing accountability and restoring trust in police. A few
examples encountered by the Task Force illuminate the challenges.

For its exploration of police measures to ban neck restraints, the Task Force reviewed available data on the
degree to which people die from asphyxiation at the hands of officers. The best source on this topic is the Fatal
Encounters database, a website run by private citizens. It documents deaths for which officers are present for
any reason and categorizes “asphyxiation” and “restraints” under one heading. The Task Force was surprised to
learn that less than 1% of deaths are classified in that category, suggesting that banning neck restraints would
not have a big impact on police killings. But there is no credible data source on the number of people who are
injured but survive neck restraints, limiting understanding of the potential impact of a ban. Further, as
documented in the Task Force report Policing by the Numbers, confirmed cases of people killed by law
enforcement are not systematically tallied by any one entity, and no single source has fully verified
comprehensive details on contextual factors surrounding these fatalities. This significantly complicates efforts
to understand the extent to which police killings involve armed or unarmed citizens, "suicide by cop" situations, or active shooters.

Federal efforts to address these shortcomings have been unsuccessful given current restrictions. The Federal Bureau of Investigation began collecting data for its National Use of Force Data Collection in 2019. To date, 42% of police agencies have contributed data, but it’s mostly inaccessible so far. That’s because the data collection, which is voluntary, restricts publication of any use-of-force statistics until at least 61% of agencies participate, at which point ratios and percentages of use-of-force incidents by category and by state may be released. Even once this voluntary system reaches the “more ambitious” 81% participation threshold, data will only be reported in the aggregate. Other efforts to democratize use-of-force and other important police data, such as the federally funded Police Data Initiative, are piecemeal at best.

As the Task Force set out to do its work, it was keenly aware of the role that race and racially disparate policing play in the public’s resounding demand for more equitable policing practices. As such, a key component of the Task Force’s review of the research evidence was a focus on what was known about the impact of various police activities on racially disparate policing. However, race-based outcomes are not routinely examined in the evaluation of police-reform measures. This is partly because data on race and ethnicity are generally poor, making it difficult to discern the degree of racial disparity in the criminal justice system and thus establish an accurate baseline against which to measure change. Metrics on ethnicity in the criminal justice system are even spottier, with one survey of state criminal justice data finding that only 15 states documented ethnicity separate and apart from “non-White.”

Finally, data on public requests for police service and how officers spend their time are crucial to understanding the opportunities and tradeoffs associated with shifting police functions to other actors or entities. A study of call takers in one of the largest public communications centers in the country found that they screen out about half of all calls prior to dispatch, suggesting that there may be far fewer calls to offload from police than some may believe. Another analysis of dispatch data from nine jurisdictions found that traffic-related calls occupied about 18% of officer response time, yet mental health-related issues made up a very small share of calls and consumed only 2.2% of officer time.

Before shifting police functions, jurisdictions must take the time to analyze the share of calls and encounters associated with those services targeted for offloading. These data are difficult to acquire and even more challenging to clean and code. Yet information on the time officers spend responding for calls, investigating crimes, and engaging in other activities is essential to inform decisions about police roles and funding.

Many data challenges can be overcome by federal leadership and the use of grant incentives. In addition, the Task Force recommends that leadership at all levels of government promote transparency in data reporting on key policing metrics, making such data available to advocates and researchers alike. Data dashboards and scorecards that enable interactive queries of the data in real time can further democratize these data and help pave the way to a deeper understanding of how to improve policing in America.
About The Task Force

The independent Task Force on Policing was launched in November 2020 by the Council on Criminal Justice. Its mission is to identify the policies and practices most likely to reduce violent encounters between officers and the public and improve the fairness and effectiveness of American policing. The 11 Task Force members represent a diverse range of perspectives and experience and include law enforcement leaders, civil rights advocates, researchers, a former mayor, and community members who have lost loved ones to police violence. The Council staffs the Task Force, and the Crime Lab at the University of Chicago’s Harris School of Public Policy is serving as its research partner.