



July 24, 2020

Greetings from your Executive Director:

Last week, we sent out the [2019 Crime in Washington](#) report and additional information for you to use for local communications. The element of **local control, local communications and local relationships in law enforcement has become more apparent and more critical** as the public health crisis and public demonstrations continue. I wanted to bring you data, information, and support for the reasons why your work to improve those communications is so important right now.

### Law Enforcement Reforms – A local conversation

The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) has provided a [set of potential reforms](#) to the Governor and legislature on June 25. These reforms range from collective bargaining reforms, to uniform use of force training centered on the sanctity of human life, to improved independent investigations of uses of deadly force by law enforcement. As with all other policy initiatives, they must be debated and enacted in collaboration with the community. WASPC welcomes that debate because the best reforms will come locally.

Very significantly, recent nationwide and local polls show that the public continues to support local law enforcement, while acknowledging the need for thoughtful reform. A critical element to remember: **local law enforcement is locally accountable**. A key message to send to our communities is: **your police chief works for your elected mayor, and your sheriff is directly elected by voters**. Solutions and improvements will not come from the federal government, or social media, or traditional media, but our policy makers and our local leaders.

### Most Trust Law Enforcement

**Managing these transitions and conversations are challenging, but polling released this week, both locally and nationally, clearly shows that despite all the division and rhetoric from all sides out there, people want positive reforms and support their local law enforcement.**

**The data and polls are showing that most people “get it”- they support their local law enforcement agency, and they understand the key difference between “defunding” and better social and behavioral services.**

Here in Washington, a [Crosscut/Elway poll](#) released this week shows respondents said more often than not that their local police treat people fairly. Asked if police in their community treat white people and people of color equally — or give one group or the other more leeway — 46 percent said police treat people equally. Nearly half said race makes no difference in the use of deadly force in their communities.

The poll also asked, “In general, how would you rate the job being done by the local police force in your community? Overall, would you rate the job they are doing?” **The poll indicated 72 percent said it was “excellent or good”.**

When asked “Do you support or oppose reducing funding for city police by 50 percent?”, only 17 percent support that statement, **and 74 percent oppose it.** However, if the question is asked in a different format, asking if they support “taking funding from the police force and investing those funds in social services and community programs”, the responses were more even.

This data seems to indicate that people do understand the complexity of the issue and strongly oppose simply slashing budgets without a plan. These decisions and changes are made at the local level.

The perspective of the media and their focus on controversy and division are pretty clearly factored in, according to polling. This week, a national [Rasmussen poll](#) showed 63 percent of Americans believe most news organizations are politically biased, and only 27 percent feel they are impartial.

As you look at the media atmosphere reflected in this polling data, Rasmussen published [another poll](#), also this week, that reinforces the fact that people still have strong support for positive police reforms, and not for divisive wedge politics and reactive changes

This national poll says that “66 percent of American adults now oppose reducing the police budget in the community where they live to channel that money into more social services. That’s [up from 59 percent in early June when the poll first asked this question.](#) Just 23 percent favor defunding police where they live, down from 27 percent in the previous survey. The poll goes on to say [Sixteen percent of Americans think most cops are racist](#), up from 10 percent a year ago. But 67 percent still rate the performance of their local police as good or excellent. Interestingly, [Americans see less racism among cops than they do among their fellow countrymen in general.](#) Twenty-two percent believe most Americans are racist.”

### Race and Equitable Policing Resources

As we have important local conversations about race and fair and equitable policing, I wanted to send out some great resources from Dr. Bryant Marks, a professor at Morehouse College and a speaker who presented on Implicit Bias and Policing at our WASPC Conference. Below are three links to short videos he has recently produced (they are also on his [Twitter](#) page) that provide a balanced and informative summary on issues related to race and policing. As he explains in the Part 2 video, “On the one hand, more white people (than black people) are shot and killed by police every year. On the other hand, under *less threatening circumstances*, more black and brown people are killed. *Multiple things can be true at the same time.* And every once in a while, two inconvenient truths collide. There’s tension, and it’s awkward, and it’s difficult.” Difficult conversations leading to real change require getting out of our corners and listening. Many of you have attended Dr. Marks’ sessions and have sent your officers and deputies, but these videos provide a good overview to potentially use with other stakeholders, and they are a good refresher on this critical topic:

[Bias by-U.S., Part 1](#)

[Bias by-US, Part 2](#)

[Bias by US, Part 3](#)

Dr. Marks mentions in Part 3 of the videos above that the issue of recruitment and retention may get worse before it gets better.

### Local decisions, local control

As cited in PERF's clips this week, former Houston Police Chief Charles McClelland made these comments recently. They speak directly to the importance of local decisions and local control:

*"I think what is going on in the country is going to be good for policing in the end. This reform movement has momentum like the one I have never seen before.*

*I spent 40 years in policing with the same agency, but I have been black for 65 years. Therefore, I understand where the frustration and angst are coming from, especially in the minority community. George Floyd grew up in a neighborhood less than a mile from where I live now. I hear from community leaders all the time. In addition, I was racially profiled on many occasions as a young black kid, teenager, and young adult before joining the police department. In addition, there were a couple times as a police officer when I was profiled.*

*Therefore, there is some historical context here that people have to understand. What we are now seeing on body cameras is what people of color have been saying for years. However, they could not prove it, and people rather wrote them off.*

*In my opinion, law enforcement agencies will not be able to just do a couple policy reviews and change a procedure here and there. They are going to have to do some systemic structural change. In my view, police chiefs and sheriffs have not listened to their communities enough. It cannot be what we think is best for the community. Law enforcement has to be what the community wants. They are your bosses. We are the subject matter experts, but the public has to determine what they want law enforcement to deliver in their communities.*

*I think we have let unions go too far, and I have been guilty of this myself as a police chief. We have stood back and said, "The union won't go for this. The union is too strong." It is because we wanted the union to like us, and we did not want that no-confidence vote. However, we should have stood up to unions more. Now unions need to understand that if they do not become part of the solution, they are going to become irrelevant."*

WASPC's reform recommendations get to the heart of what Chief McClelland talks about- as well as wellness and resiliency to ensure officers and deputies get the support they need and deserve in a difficult job.

Just a few other items for the newsletter this week-

First here is a very positive [story](#) that was highlighted this week in the Seattle Times about the response of **Des Moines Police officers**.

Next, here is a [statement](#) put out last week by IACP- the last sentence pertains specifically to chokeholds and use of force- just to make you aware of it.\_

Here is a link to a [good](#) story about Bellingham's P.D.'s accreditation. If you are interested in accreditation, contact our Director of Professional Services, [Mike Painter](#).

Finally, **KING 5 from Seattle asked us about how many departments are using body cams--** we had a list back in 2016 when it was required by the legislature as they considered whether to provide some exceptions to public disclosure rules, but that list has not been updated. I understand KING 5 has been calling individual departments asking about their body camera use and plans- just FYI. Remember that in our legislative policy proposals we will be recommending that they facilitate implementation of body cameras.

Please know we are here to support you and work for better outcomes for you, your teams and your communities!

Stay Safe- Steve