

# PUBLIC SAFETY BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Summary

When AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka launched the AFL-CIO Task Force on Racial Justice last summer, the work of the task force was divided into five subcommittees, one of which was a subcommittee on policing to provide a venue for union members in law enforcement, and their representatives, to develop recommendations on issues of public safety reform. (The task force continues to advance important work on fighting for racial justice through criminal justice reform and strengthening the muscle of the civil, human and women's rights work throughout the labor movement.)

The AFL-CIO has 13 affiliate unions who represent law enforcement professionals represented on the subcommittee. The subcommittee expanded to include representatives from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), both of which represent law enforcement officers.

This Public Safety Blueprint for Change is written by and from the perspective of unionized law enforcement officers and leaders, and endorsed by the participating unions and the AFL-CIO Task Force on Racial Justice.

The subcommittee came together in good faith, acknowledging certain things from the start: that

systemic racism is a powerful force which must be acknowledged as the context for the work, that some acts by the police violate the sanctity of what the labor movement stands for and that having a union card carries with it responsibilities as well as rights. In order to protect the vital role of unions for all working people, unions that represent law enforcement officers must take action.

The labor movement, as an integral part of our communities and the representative of many law enforcement officers, has a unique role to play in changing public safety. The fundamental goals of this blueprint are to build productive, positive and trusting community relationships, and to have the working union professionals who provide public safety daily be a driving force for meaningful reforms grounded in equity, inclusion and racial justice.

This blueprint makes recommendations in four key areas, starting with holding law enforcement accountable.

### **Union Law Enforcement Accountability and Duty Standards (U-LEADS) Program**

The aim of the program is to hold union members accountable to an agreed-upon set of commitments and to our core union values. U-LEADS will empower local union members to speak up and take action if fellow members are violating their professional

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oath or abusing their power, and ultimately helps the union weed out wrong-doers from union membership.

**Key Recommendations:**

- National and local unions that represent law enforcement officers should adopt the U-LEADS program.
- Labor should work with existing infrastructure, such as AFL-CIO state federations and central labor councils, to engage in community dialogue and implement recommendations.

## **Reimagining Public Safety—The Differential Response Model**

Differential response means pairing non-police resources with law enforcement and evaluating who should be responding to calls for service. It focuses police resources on responding to situations where law enforcement expertise and training is most applicable, while dispatching other resources when those are best tailored to the situation.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Law enforcement agencies and our unions should engage in a community-driven, collaborative process to formulate a new vision for public safety. Forward-thinking approaches in policing emphasize the primacy of community participation. This approach, according to the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, can ensure a system of public safety is created that keeps communities and police safe, particularly in underserved communities.
- Law enforcement agencies, working with our unions, should expressly develop a comprehensive, differential response model focusing on implementation of the most effective strategies to handle emergency and service calls from the community. Every jurisdiction has an opportunity to implement a coordinated differential response model to address public safety issues.

## **Recruitment, Retention, Officer Wellness and Early Intervention Systems**

A police force should look like the community it serves. Best practices should be used for recruitment and retention of talented personnel who reflect the community’s diversity. Officer wellness must be seen in a holistic way that includes physical, mental and emotional wellness, as well as to give recommendations on early intervention systems aimed at identifying potentially problematic performance in advance.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Agencies, working with our unions, should formulate a comprehensive professional development program, including opportunities for leadership training, educational opportunities, and cross-training programs with neighboring jurisdictions and other city departments.
- Agencies, working with our unions, should establish a program with protocols to assist officers who have responded to high-stress calls, providing both mandatory and voluntary opportunities for officers to be matched with mental health services.

## **National Training and Education Standards**

The blueprint calls for baseline, portable, national standards for training, knowing there are some 18,000 law enforcement agencies across the country with autonomous standards and requirements. The recommendations include incentivizing continuing education and requiring the initial recruit, and ongoing in-service training, to include training on de-escalation, diversity, and cultural competency.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Law enforcement agencies, officers and elected officials, working with our unions, should have input in developing learning goals and model curricula/

training for each level of police leadership. To be effective and current, this training must be a permanent continuing structure throughout every officer's career.

- Training must include topics such as implicit bias, systemic racism, fair and impartial policing, competency in cultural differences, and other areas that help build trust and legitimacy in diverse communities and offer solutions for gaining compliance without the use of force.

**Bottom Line:** The subcommittee, as leaders who have pledged to “serve and protect” the community, has a responsibility to be a part of transforming policing to become what communities

and those who work in law enforcement need to thrive and be safe. Those experiences and expertise in shaping public safety for the 21st century is vital to a transformation that is successful and sustaining.

Finally, law enforcement professionals and community leaders and members must come together to reconstruct the basic contract that allows law enforcement officers to do their job with more transparency, accountability within the profession, and with the funding needed to keep the community and ourselves safe.

To view the full blueprint, visit [aflcio.org/reports/public-safety-blueprint-change](https://aflcio.org/reports/public-safety-blueprint-change).