

The first witnesses at the task force sessions on Pillar One also directly addressed the need for a change in the culture in which police do their work: the use of disrespectful language and the implicit biases that lead officers to rely upon race in the context of stop and frisk. They addressed the need for police officers to find how much they have in common with the people they serve—not the lines of authority they may perceive to separate them—and to continue with enduring programs proven successful over many years.

Several speakers stressed the continuing need for civilian oversight and urged more research into proving ways it can be most effective. And many spoke to the complicated issue of diversity in recruiting, especially Sherrilyn Ifill, who said of youth in poor communities,

By the time you are 17, you have been stopped and frisked a dozen times. That does not make that 17-year-old want to become a police officer . . . The challenge is to transform the idea of policing in communities among young people into something they see as honorable. They have to see people at local events, as the person who lives across the street, not someone who comes in and knows nothing about my community.<sup>14</sup>

The task force’s specific recommendations that follow offer practical ways agencies can act to promote legitimacy.

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**1.1 RECOMMENDATION: Law enforcement culture should embrace a guardian mindset to build public trust and legitimacy. Toward that end, police and sheriffs’ departments should adopt procedural justice as the guiding principle for internal and external policies and practices to guide their interactions with the citizens they serve.**

How officers define their role will set the tone for the community. As Plato wrote, “In a republic that honors the core of democracy—the greatest amount of power is given to those called Guardians. Only those with the most impeccable character are chosen to bear the responsibility of protecting the democracy.”

Law enforcement cannot build community trust if it is seen as an occupying force coming in from outside to rule and control the community.

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<sup>14</sup> Listening Session on Building Trust and Legitimacy (oral testimony of Sherrilyn Ifill, president and director-counsel, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., for the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Washington, DC, January 13, 2015); “Statement by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.” (written testimony submitted for listening session at Washington, DC, January 13, 2015).

As task force member Susan Rahr wrote

In 2012, we began asking the question, “Why are we training police officers like soldiers?” Although police officers wear uniforms and carry weapons, the similarity ends there. The missions and rules of engagement are completely different. The soldier’s mission is that of a warrior: to conquer. The rules of engagement are decided before the battle. The police officer’s mission is that of a guardian: to protect. The rules of engagement evolve as the incident unfolds. Soldiers must follow orders. Police officers must make independent decisions. Soldiers come into communities as an outside, occupying force. Guardians are members of the community, protecting from within.<sup>15</sup>

There’s an old saying, “Organizational culture eats policy for lunch.” Any law enforcement organization can make great rules and policies that emphasize the guardian role, but if policies conflict with the existing culture, they will not be institutionalized and behavior will not change. In police work, the vast majority of an officer’s work is done independently, outside the immediate oversight of a supervisor. But consistent enforcement of rules that conflict with a military-style culture, where obedience to the chain of command is the norm, is nearly impossible. Behavior is more likely to conform to culture than rules.

The culture of policing is also important to the proper exercise of officer discretion and use of authority, as task force member Tracey Meares has written.<sup>16</sup> The values and ethics of the agency will guide officers in their decision-making process; they cannot just rely on rules and policy to act in encounters with the public. Good policing is more than just complying with the law. Sometimes actions are perfectly permitted by policy, but that does not always mean an officer should take those actions. Adopting procedural justice as the guiding principle for internal and external policies and practices can be the underpinning of a change in culture and should contribute to building trust and confidence in the community.

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**1.2 RECOMMENDATION: Law enforcement agencies should acknowledge the role of policing in past and present injustice and discrimination and how it is a hurdle to the promotion of community trust.**

At one listening session, a panel of police chiefs described what they had been doing in recent years to recognize and own the history and to change the culture within both the police forces and the communities.

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<sup>15</sup> Sue Rahr, “Transforming the Culture of Policing from Warriors to Guardians in Washington State,” *International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training Newsletter* 25, no. 4 (2014): 3–4.

<sup>16</sup> Tracey L. Meares, “Rightful Policing,” *New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2015), NCJ 248411.