

## **Testimony**

### **National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)**

#### **Before U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary**

**Thursday, September 19, 2019**

Committee Chairman, Representative Jerrold Nadler, Ranking Member, Representative Doug Collins, and members of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary, I bring you greetings on behalf of the Executive Board and members of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives – NOBLE.

My name is Gina Hawkins and I am the National Treasurer of NOBLE and the Chief of Police for the Fayetteville Police Department in Fayetteville, North Carolina. It is an honor for NOBLE to provide written testimony on the topic of policing oversight.

NOBLE has been at the forefront of promoting police accountability since the organization's inception in 1976. Our mission is to ensure equity in the administration of justice in the provision of public service to all communities, and to serve as the conscience of law enforcement by being committed to justice by action. Law enforcement agencies and their leaders have a responsibility to ensure that justice is administered fairly in all communities. NOBLE member chiefs and sheriffs hold themselves and their agencies to a high professional standard ensuring that officers and

the communities they serve and protect, are aligned with a priority for everyone's safety.

The police are not perfect and we recognize the need to take steps to improve service, build trust in our communities, and increase operational transparency. NOBLE has been actively involved in national level discussions on the key areas of police accountability, use-of-force, and reducing gun violence. There has been universal recognition expressed by NOBLE to the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) on the importance of maintaining a level of police accountability in the form of the previous model of the Collaborative Reform Initiative or similar style federal resources. Law Enforcement agencies that seek to improve their operations, use the nationally adopted blueprint for 21st century policing, and build trust and legitimacy with their community, should be afforded the technical assistance resources necessary for improvement without any punitive federal level recourse. Agency leaders should also have access to high-quality policing professionals who can assist that agency with assessing areas for improvement and developing strategies to modernize their police operation and culture to best meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century policing as already outlined by the Department of Justice. As chief of the Fayetteville Police Department, my predecessor used the technical assistance resources provided through Collaborative Reform to help the agency develop a strategy to improve engagement at all levels of the department, and particularly with communities of color. Our department did not shy away from

taking a close look at our training, traffic and pedestrian stop data, and our citizen engagement to identify areas of improvement. Today, we are a better informed and engaged department because of the leadership that I and other NOBLE leaders provide to their agencies because we recognize the need to measure up to the expectations of our communities and ensure policing is a credible profession respected in our communities for being honest, trustworthy, and fair to everyone we serve and protect.

The federal government can play an important role in influencing local municipalities and their police agencies to address systemic issues that are adversely impacting their ability to protect and serve their communities. A key assumption that has been challenged by NOBLE is that policing organizations can easily police themselves without applying best practices and following the nationally adopted blueprint for 21st century policing. As the data shows, it is very rare for the federal government to enforce a consent decree. Since 1997 there have only been 21 court enforced consent decrees on law enforcement agencies compared to the over 18,000 agencies that serve our communities. Most law enforcement agencies are filled with committed, fair, and honest men and women who put on their police uniform everyday with the sole intent of keeping everyone safe. In the instance where deadly force is used, a third-party intervention could be beneficial and many states and even agencies have adopted policies that already implement this critical public trust component. The ultimate goal in police accountability is to strengthen trust and legitimacy between law enforcement

and the community. A strong trustworthy and legitimate agency can create a safer environment for law enforcement officers and citizens of that community. NOBLE police chiefs and sheriffs provide law enforcement agency leadership to over half of the largest cities in the nation. They are committed to effective community policing and holding our agencies and officers to the highest standards in the policing profession.

On behalf of the law enforcement leaders of NOBLE, thank you for supporting law enforcement and our ability to maintain public safety while continuing to build strong relationships with our communities. Our members stand ready to meet the needs of our diverse communities. Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony.