

STATEMENT OF
GERRI RATLIFF
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND
RELATED AGENCIES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FOR A HEARING ENTITLED

“OVERSIGHT OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE PROGRAMS
AND OPERATIONS”

PRESENTED ON

SEPTEMBER 10, 2019

10:00 A.M.

**GERRI RATLIFF
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED
AGENCIES
SEPTEMBER 10, 2019**

Chairman Serrano, Ranking Member Aderholdt, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. I am pleased to provide an overview of the mission and work of the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service, or CRS.

CRS Mission

CRS serves as “America’s Peacemaker” for communities in conflict by mediating disputes and enhancing community capacity to independently prevent and resolve future conflicts. CRS works with community groups to resolve community conflicts and prevent and respond to alleged violent hate crimes arising from differences of race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability.

With its unique mission, CRS is the only federal agency dedicated to assisting state and local units of government, private and public organizations, law enforcement, and community groups to build capacity to resolve conflicts based on race, religion, gender, or other statutory categories. CRS helps facilitate the development of mutual understanding and agreement as alternatives to coercion, violence, or litigation.

Additionally, CRS conducts trainings and helps develop locally-based, long-term mechanisms that communities may use to prevent tension and violent hate crimes. CRS conciliation specialists are impartial and do not take sides among disputing parties as they work to aid community groups in developing their own mutually agreeable solutions.

CRS History

In its early years, CRS was active in helping to reduce and prevent violence and conflict during the turbulent era in which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. sought to advance civil rights through peaceful resistance. Title X of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 authorized CRS to assist communities facing disputes, disagreements, or difficulties relating to allegations of discriminatory practices based on race, color, or national origin.

In March 1965, less than a year after its formation, CRS was on the ground in Selma, Alabama, to help prevent civil disorder during the latter two of three marches led by Dr. King, as part of the Voting Rights Movement. At the request of President Lyndon B. Johnson, CRS worked with Dr. King, law enforcement, and city officials to help ensure the marches were

peaceful. These marches were catalysts for passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Dr. King's legacy of striving for racial equality and civil rights through nonviolent means continues today.

CRS's mandate expanded in 2009 under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act to include working with communities to prevent and respond to alleged hate crimes based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability.

Some key moments in CRS's history which highlight the evolution of conflicts in this country and the role that CRS played in addressing them include:

- 1973: Siege at Wounded Knee, South Dakota
- 1974: Boston Public Schools Busing Crisis
- 1982: Murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit
- 1992: Rodney King Riots
- 1995-1998: Arson and Desecration of Churches
- 2001: Backlash Against Arab, Muslim, and Sikh Communities after September 11 Terrorist Attacks
- 2005: Hurricane Katrina Recovery Efforts
- 2012: Trayvon Martin Shooting
- 2017: Violent Demonstrations in Charlottesville

CRS Services

CRS's alternative dispute resolution services are facilitated by highly-skilled Conciliation Specialists who provide mediation, facilitated dialogue, training, and consultation services to communities experiencing conflict across the United States and in its territories. CRS Conciliation Specialists are trained professional mediators, facilitators, trainers, and consultants, who are experienced in bringing community members together to help them enhance their ability to prevent and resolve existing and future conflicts. CRS staff travel to cities and towns to work directly with all community conflict stakeholders and assist them in developing strategies to respond to conflicts and reduce tensions.

To accomplish its mission, CRS provides four services: facilitated dialogues, mediation, training, and consultation. These services help communities enhance their ability to alleviate tension, resolve disputes, and prevent future conflicts more effectively.

- **Facilitated Dialogues.** Conciliation Specialists provide facilitated dialogue services to help communities open lines of communication by listening to the issues of each stakeholder group and learning from each party about the problem and underlying issues of the conflict. These dialogues often include various local and federal agencies, faith-based organizations, educational institutions, civil rights organizations, and community residents. Topics of discussion frequently include race, police-community relations, perceived hate crimes and bias incidents, tribal conflicts, and protests and demonstrations. The dialogues help communities develop action plans for building trust

and strengthening relationships between groups, as well as resolving conflicts in neighborhoods and schools.

- **Mediation.** Conciliation Specialists serve as mediators to help diverse stakeholders resolve community-level disputes. As mediators, Conciliation Specialists assume the role of neutral third parties, who facilitate problem-solving discussions with parties in conflict. These mediation sessions are confidential, allowing for candid discussion of issues, interests, values, and, ultimately, sustainable solutions. Mediation provides a framework that helps communities resolve misunderstandings, establish mutual trust, and independently prevent and resolve future conflicts. The intent of mediation is not to determine fault. Frequently, the results of a community's mediation will be memorialized in a document, such as a Memorandum of Understanding, Mediation Agreement, Resolution, Proclamation, Collaborative Agreement, Community Pact, or Ordinance.
- **Training.** Conciliation Specialists provide an array of training programs to law enforcement groups and communities as a tool for cultivating understanding, building relationships, and conducting safe public events. Several of these trainings provide a structure for law enforcement to develop plans to strengthen engagement with various community groups. Other trainings provide templates for groups planning marches and other high-profile events to develop procedures to ensure safety.
- **Consultation.** Conciliation Specialists offer consultation services to help educate and empower communities, as well as to refine conflict resolution strategies and improve their ability to address underlying sources of tension. Through consultation, CRS provides technical assistance, as well as information on best practices. This service also includes giving advice, sharing insight, and referring communities to available resources.

CRS Programs

As part of its services, CRS offers a number of programs to assist communities in solving conflicts and building the skills and capacity necessary to prevent and respond to future issues and tension. These programs bring together representatives from local government agencies, community and faith-based organizations, law enforcement agencies, civil rights groups, and businesses to develop collaborative approaches for reducing tensions and addressing the factors that have contributed to the conflict. CRS's programs include:

- **Bias Incidents and Hate Crimes Forum.** CRS facilitates forums that convene local and federal law enforcement and community-based organizations in educational discussions to share information about hate crime laws and reporting, as well as approaches to combat and respond to bias incidents and hate crimes. These forums also provide the opportunity for law enforcement and community members to network and strengthen relationships.
- **Protecting Places of Worship.** These forums offer best practices to help communities protect places of worship against potential threats. The forums convene local, state, and federal law enforcement officials and faith-based organizations in a dialogue to provide information and resources related to hate crime laws, active shooter situations, and physical security at religious buildings.
- **Law Enforcement and the Transgender Community.** This program provides law enforcement and government officials with information on the transgender community,

including definitions and preferred language, outreach strategies, and the impact of hate crimes on transgender individuals.

- **Engaging and Building Partnerships with Muslim Americans/Engaging and Building Partnerships with Sikh Americans.** The goals of these two programs are to increase public awareness of civil rights-related issues that impact Muslim and Sikh Americans, enhance understanding of beliefs and religious practices of Muslim and Sikh Americans to improve communication and public safety for all community members, and provide best practices for collaboration with the Muslim and Sikh American communities and a template for related action planning.
- **Contingency Planning: Reducing Risk During Public Events.** This program increases participants' knowledge of how to plan for safe public events, such as demonstrations or rallies, in order to decrease the potential for violence. It also includes time for participants to begin developing an appropriate plan to prepare for and hold an event and assess and address potential issues for maintaining public safety during the event.
- **Event Marshals: Supporting Safety During Public Events.** Event Marshals support a safe and successful public event by being the primary point of contact with event participants. The goal of this program is to explain the expectations for the Event Marshal position, as well as the importance of the Event Marshal's role in maintaining public safety during an event.
- **Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP).** SPCP convenes law enforcement and diverse community leaders in problem-solving discussions focused on overcoming historic barriers, improving trust, and developing partnerships. The program is designed to increase local community capacity and implement solutions to address police-community relations issues. CRS piloted SPCP in Erie, PA, and Topeka, KS, in FY 2018 and work in these cities continues through FY 2019.
- **Dialogue on Race.** The Dialogue on Race program brings together diverse community members to exchange information, share personal stories and experiences, express perspectives, clarify viewpoints, and develop understanding on race-related issues. Through the dialogue process, parties are able to identify commonalities and ways to work together to improve community relations.
- **School-Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together (School-SPIRIT).** The School-SPIRIT program engages diverse student leaders in identifying issues impacting their school and developing and implementing solutions to resolve those issues. A similar program is available for college or university settings, called Campus-Site Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together (Campus-SPIRIT).
- **City-Site Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together (City-SPIRIT).** The City-SPIRIT program brings together public officials, law enforcement, faith-based and civil rights leaders, and other community groups to identify issues impacting their neighborhoods and implement solutions that reduce conflict, improve communication, and minimize the potential for future conflict.

FY 2018 and FY 2019 CRS Case Highlights

With 16 Conciliation Specialists and five Regional Directors, CRS has provided services to community groups in over 150 cases as of the end of the third quarter of FY 2019. These cases include seven mediations, 17 trainings, 93 facilitated dialogues, and 120 consultations.

A key focus for CRS is addressing hate crimes in communities across the country. The latest Federal Bureau of Investigation's Hate Crimes Statistics Report showed a 17 percent increase in reported hate crimes from 2016 to 2017. To help communities address local concerns about the rise in hate crimes, CRS facilitated 16 Hate Crimes Forums and nine Protecting Places of Worship (PPOW) Forums in FY 2018. So far in FY 2019, CRS has facilitated nine Hate Crimes Forums and 14 Protecting Places of Worship Forums, including PPOWs in Hammond, Indiana, and Queens, New York, in just the last few weeks. These forums have taken place in all parts of the country including Alaska, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

As in prior years, the majority of CRS cases are based on race, color, and national origin. In FY 2019, cases based on religion have also become an area of focus for CRS. For example, in FY 2019, CRS has provided services in 19 incidents related to anti-Semitism, from the Tree of Life synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh to the shooting at the Chabad of Poway synagogue in southern California to a community dialogue in Ocean County, New Jersey, yesterday. Incidents such as these increase tensions, not only in the local communities in which they occur, but around the country as well. CRS is in a unique position to bring together interfaith groups, law enforcement, emergency management officials, and civil rights organizations to address the fear that religious communities experience in the aftermath of hate crimes that target their members. CRS also provides resources and best practices to these communities for how to prevent and respond to hate crimes in their churches, temples, synagogues, gurdwaras, and other places of worship.

A few examples of CRS cases in FY 2018 and FY 2019 include:

- **Improving Police-Community Relations (Sacramento, CA):** In response to city-wide protests and unrest following the police-shooting death of Stephon Clark, CRS immediately deployed to Sacramento in March 19, 2018 and engaged in dialogues with local activists, as well as the mayor, chief of police, and local civil rights organizations to reduce tensions in the city, which threatened to turn into violence. CRS helped the city and local leaders develop a city-wide program to engage citizens in discussions on issues of race, police-community relations, and other concerns. These discussions led this year to a report outlining next steps for the city to improve relations between law enforcement and the communities they serve.
- **School-SPIRIT (Riverdale, MD):** A middle school in Riverdale, MD, was experiencing violence between African American and Latino students, which created tension and fear within the school and the surrounding community. On October 24, 2018, at the request of school district officials, CRS facilitated the day-long School-SPIRIT program which engages students in constructive dialogue and empowers them to develop solutions to problems in their school. The program led to a formal report and creation of a student-led SPIRIT Council charged with implementing the solutions identified in the report.
- **Response to Tree of Life Massacre (Pittsburgh, PA):** Following the mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue on October 27, 2018, which killed 11 people, CRS immediately deployed to Pittsburgh and convened several meetings with the U.S. Attorney's Office, local civil rights and faith-based groups, youth organizations, and city

and state officials to help the city reduce tensions and address concerns about future hate crimes in the community. Working with federal partners, CRS also helped to convene a working group to respond to the Tree of Life incident and prevent future hate crimes from occurring. CRS still provides support to Pittsburgh stakeholders as they continue to recover from the deadliest attack on a Jewish community in the United States.

- **City-SPIRIT (Lewiston, ME):** The city of Lewiston was experiencing racial tensions between white residents and the local Somali immigrant population. At the request of local law enforcement, CRS conducted an assessment of local tensions and offered to conduct the day-long City-SPIRIT program to open dialogue between residents, along with city, law enforcement, and community leaders. The March 2019 City-SPIRIT allowed participants to share their concerns and develop solutions collaboratively for addressing racial tensions in the community. The City created a working group, comprised of representatives of the community groups and local officials that participated in the program, to help implement the solutions identified by the City SPIRIT participants.
- **Event Marshal Training and Consultation at Ku Klux Klan (KKK) Rally (Dayton, OH):** On May 25, 2019, CRS was onsite in Dayton, OH, to help ensure that a planned KKK rally and counter-protest remained peaceful. CRS provided event marshal training to participants in the counter-protest. CRS also monitored the rally and counter-protest to help address any tensions that might arise. The rally was peaceful, and no arrests or violent incidents ensued.

Program Evaluation Activities in FYs 2018 and 2019

Over the last two fiscal years (FYs 2018 and 2019), CRS has implemented a more comprehensive program development and evaluation process. CRS recognized the need to professionalize and standardize the training and facilitated dialogue programs delivered to law enforcement, schools, and diverse communities across the United States. CRS incorporated cutting-edge instructional design and adult learning principles into all of the agency's programs, including interactive and action-orientated activities, videos, and small group discussions. These principles not only significantly elevated the overall quality of CRS's programs, but they aligned the agency's program content and delivery methods with the needs of the adult learners participating in our programs.

To further ensure that CRS's programs effectively meet the needs of our stakeholders, in FY 2018 CRS began implementing a program evaluation for our facilitated dialogue and training programs. These evaluations aid CRS in the ongoing improvement of our service delivery and allow the agency to respond to the ever-changing needs of our diverse stakeholders.

CRS began with "day of program" evaluations to collect participants' feedback on seven of our trainings and facilitated dialogue programs, including training content, logistics, delivery methods, and trainers. The programs evaluated in FYs 18 and 19 were:

- Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships, and
- Protecting Places of Worship Forums,
- Hate Crimes Forums,
- Engaging and Building Partnerships with Muslim Americans,

- Engaging and Building Partnerships with Sikh Americans,
- Engaging and Building Relationships with Transgender Communities.
- Event Marshals

In fiscal year 2018, CRS administered evaluations in two Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP) programs, one in Erie, PA, and one in Topeka, KS. The evaluations showed that 75% of attendees strongly agreed or agreed that the program improved communication and strengthened collaboration between the community and law enforcement. Additionally, 83% of attendees strongly agreed or agreed that the program increased their knowledge and understanding of the issues impacting police and community partnerships.

Written comments from the participants included:

- “The community got to interact with an actual patrol officer.”
- “I liked ... how the people were broken up into groups, then further into subgroups. This allowed people to express their ideas without a bunch of people watching you.”
- “I liked being able to have conversation with people I do not encounter every day.”
- “Bringing diverse people/organizations together and having an honest and safe conversation.”

In fiscal years 2018 and 2019, CRS administered evaluations in three Protecting Places of Worship Forums (PPOWs) and 1Hate Crimes Forum. The evaluations showed 86% of PPOW and 89% of Hate Crime Forum attendees strongly agreed or agreed that the program was interesting and engaging, as well as a worthwhile use of their time.

Written comments from the participants included:

- “Most valuable thing I learned was how to make a plan, use church resources (people), work with local authorities for training and/or advise to meet with committee.” (PPOW)
- “I now know who to contact in hate crime cases from local to federal [authorities].” (PPOW)
- “Learned a lot about the different resources available to make our place [of worship] safer.” (PPOW)
- “I liked how this program is spreading awareness and letting citizens know help is available.” (PPOW)
- “The most valuable thing I learned all the different ways you can report [hate crimes].” (HCF)
- “I plan to utilize the resources provided when faced with a hate crime investigation.” (HCF)

CRS also administered evaluations in six “Engaging and Building Partnerships with Muslim Americans” and “Engaging and Building Partnerships with Sikh Americans” trainings. The evaluations showed that over 90% of trainees strongly agreed or agreed that the training program was worth their time, and 95% strongly agreed or agreed that the program achieved its goals and was engaging and interesting.

Written comments from the participants included:

- “The most valuable thing I have learned the most is a basic understanding of the faith and culture and how that applies to law enforcement.”
- “Very applicable to my job.”
- “Gained an awareness of building trust with Muslim community.”

CRS is using the evaluation data to help us improved training content and make these programs as effective and impactful as possible. CRS also used focus groups this fiscal year to identify areas of improvement and inform program revisions, which allows the agency to better meet the needs of stakeholders. For example, CRS just revised the content of our “Engaging and Building Partnerships with Muslim and Sikh Americans” trainings, based on the evaluation data and focus group input.

This year, CRS also administered evaluations and conducted a focus group after a pilot session of the newly-updated “Engaging and Building Relationships with Transgender Communities” training. The evaluations showed that 98% of trainees strongly agreed or agreed that the program achieved its goals and that the program was engaging and interesting. The training content was revised where needed, to incorporate the feedback received in the evaluations and focus group.

Written comments from the participants, who were all police officers, included:

- “This training will inform policy development in my [police] department.”
- “[I learned] how to interact with the LGBTQ+ community.”
- “I felt comfortable asking questions, even controversial ones.”

CRS uses local Subject Matter Experts to help conduct these three trainings. The experts complete a 1.5 day Train-the-Trainer (TOT) program and co-facilitate with a CRS Conciliation Specialist before they are approved to deliver additional trainings. In fiscal years 2018 and 2019, CRS administered evaluations in six TOTs. For example, 95% of trainees agree that the information received in the session would help them present content more effectively.

Written comments from the participants included:

- “The most valuable thing I have learned,,is how to engage with the audience.”
- “This has been a really worthwhile two days. I’ve learned a lot. I definitely feel more confident presenting this material.”
- “Implement best practices learned (on developing) presentations. I will encourage this training to the local police department.”

Finally, in fiscal year 2019, CRS administered evaluations and conducted a focus group in one pilot session of the recently updated Event Marshals training. Participant data includes that 97% of attendees strongly agreed or agreed that the program achieved its goals and that trainees had a better understanding of the marshal role.

Written comments from the participants included:

- “Fostered open, honest communication.”
- “Each strategy provided valuable information.”

The CRS training team reviews evaluation responses after every training and program for changes to content or format that should be implemented immediately. In addition, CRS reviews all evaluation data for a training or program once a year as a part of an annual content update cycle.

Other CRS Accomplishments in FY 2019

In addition to its extensive casework in the field, CRS has also completed a number of critical projects that facilitate the agency's delivery of services and outreach to communities this fiscal year, as well as support relevant Department of Justice initiatives. These accomplishments include:

- **DOJ Hate Crimes Website (www.justice.gov/hatecrimes):** As a part of the Department of Justice's Hate Crimes Enforcement and Prevention Initiative, and working with other DOJ components, CRS helped launch the DOJ Hate Crimes website on October 29, 2018. The website is a one-stop portal for the general public, law enforcement officials, educators, public officials, media, and other stakeholders to access DOJ resources to address hate crimes. As of August 1, 2019, the site has had over 170,000 visitors and almost 280,000 page views, and visitors come from all 50 states.
- **Training Pilots:** CRS piloted updated trainings, "Engaging and Building Partnerships with Muslim Americans" and "Engaging and Building Partnerships with Sikh Americans" with law enforcement participants in Houston, TX (April), and Middlesex County, NJ (July). CRS also piloted an updated "Engaging and Building Relationships with Transgender Communities," training in Washington, DC, in July. The pilots, with updated statistics and interactive activities to better meet adult learning best practices, were well received by participants.
- **New Training Resources:** CRS has created a number of resources to help stakeholders build local capacity to address conflicts, tensions, and hate crimes in their communities. These include facilitator guides for the CRS Hate Crimes Forums and Protecting Places of Worship Forums and a pocket guide for Event Marshals.
- **Updated CRS Website (www.justice.gov/crs):** Last month, CRS launched an updated website which includes refreshed content and improved navigation to CRS resources and information about programs and services.
- **Collaboration on Hate Crimes Training:** In addition, as a part of the Department's Hate Crimes Initiative, CRS is collaborating with other DOJ components to develop community-facing hate crimes training to address a growing need to help organizations and individuals build local capacity to address hate crimes in their communities. This training will be piloted soon.

Activities Planned for FY 2020

CRS anticipates that its trend in FY2019 of responding to an increased number of religion-based bias incidents and hate crimes will continue in FY2020, in addition to its work in its other jurisdictional categories. As always, incidents and tensions based on race will continue to comprise the largest share of our work with communities. Programmatic activities planned for FY 2020 include:

- **Ten-Year Anniversary of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevent Act (HCPA):** Again, as part of the Department of Justice’s Hate Crimes Enforcement and Prevention Initiative, CRS, in collaboration with the DOJ Civil Rights Division and Office of Community Oriented Policing, will be co-hosting an event in the Great Hall of the Main Justice building to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the enactment of the HCPA. The event is currently planned for October 16, 2019.
- **Updated Programs:** This year, CRS began updating its “City-SPIRIT,” “School-SPIRIT,” and Community Dialogue programs by soliciting feedback from internal subject matter experts and developing standard tools and resources to support the delivery of those programs. CRS Conciliation Specialists will be trained on these updated programs early in FY 2020.
- **New Training:** In addition, CRS will pilot a new training course for stakeholders on skills for facilitating multi-party meetings.
- **Program Evaluation:** Finally, in addition to implementing “day of program” evaluations for every CRS training and facilitated dialogue program, CRS plans to develop and pilot an assessment process that will be conducted 3-6 months after delivery of the program or training to measure the longer-term impact of our services on community conflict resolution capacity building and the degree to which participants have applied the knowledge and skills learned in the trainings. CRS plans to pilot these evaluations in the following four programs and trainings:
 - School-Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues (School-SPIRIT),
 - Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP),
 - Engaging and Building Partnerships with Muslim Americans, and
 - Engaging and Building Partnerships with Sikh Americans.

These evaluations will allow CRS to go beyond the immediate reactions of trainees on the day of the program and begin to measure community impacts, such as whether police officers believe that what they learned resulted in a ability to have more effective interactions with Muslim Americans or Sikh Americans, whether schools followed up after CRS facilitated dialogue programs by implementing solutions identified by students, and whether community groups and local police have seen improved trust and relationships after a CRS program.

Conclusion

I would like to close by thanking you for this opportunity to discuss the work of CRS and our commitment to serving communities as “America’s Peacemaker.” We are grateful for this Committee’s leadership. Thank you for your support.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have.