
CITY OF
HOUSTON

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON POLICING REFORM

SEPTEMBER 2020

“In Plato’s vision of a perfect society—in a republic that honors the core of democracy—the greatest amount of power is given to those called the Guardians. Only those with the most impeccable character are chosen to bear the responsibility of protecting the democracy.”

—THE NOBILITY OF POLICING



THE PEOPLE ARE THE CITY

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ouston 911... Do you need medical, police, or fire? What is the address of your emergency?"

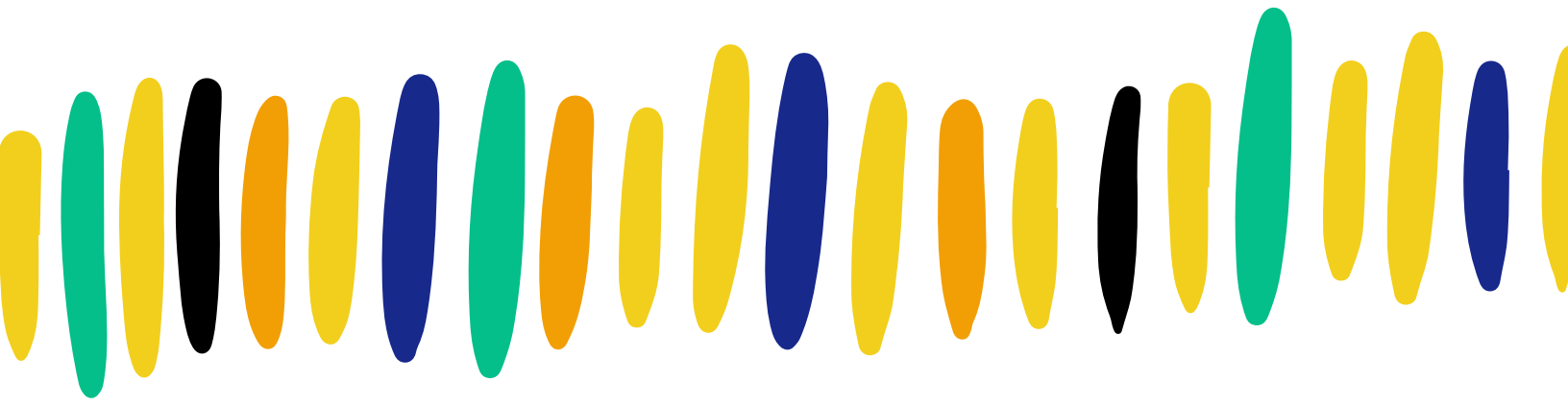
The conclusion of this call for service from a member of our community should not end in the death of a Black or Brown human being. All too often, this has been the case. Can this ever be different?

Citizens over the decades have increasingly entrusted law enforcement with the privilege to protect and serve its citizenry. After all, they are public servants.

This privilege is granted in Houston through the community's election of a Mayor, the appointment of a Police Chief by that Mayor, and the budget allocated to the department by vote of the City Council.

Over time, as the social fabric of society has evolved, Houstonians have allowed police officers to assume far too many non-law enforcement duties without proper context, training, and supervision. We must properly train and support partnerships to aid our officers.

We must examine 911 calls for police intervention—calls that all too often lead to on-the-scene escalation rather than de-escalation and so-called “justified” excessive force. Just because it is legal does not make it right, particularly if it leads to the death of a human being.



Change comes when we address culture and policies, track behaviors, establish appropriate consequences for one's actions, and conduct regular evaluations and assessments.

The titles of the cast members of these all-too-familiar tragedies and life-ending stories must change. The fixed roles of victims, villains, heroes, enemies, allies, supporters, and detractors are all in need of being re-examined and recast, particularly in the "majority-minority" city that is Houston. Transparency and accountability are essential components in achieving change.

In the events of recent months, it is clear in Houston and across the nation that our community, Mayor, City Council, Police Chief, officers, and their Union must all work together to protect and serve the constitutional rights of all our citizens.

The Mayor's Task Force on Policing Reform has listened to numerous voices of Houstonians and organizations, as to the type and kind of police department they desire and demand. We have engaged in extensive research on the issues

and best practices around the country. The Task Force's community survey alone yielded over 7,000 responses.

Enclosed are the one hundred and four (104) recommendations for policing reform proposed by the 45 members and organizations of this citizen-led Task Force.

We look forward to your establishment of timelines, reports of implementation, and measurement of progress on behalf of all Houstonians. We stand ready to assist in the next phase of this ongoing process.

I close with this question: What will the fair, moral, and ethical treatment of all human being lives look like?

We have not asked this question because it is a hard question and therefore, we have avoided it. People want to do the right thing, but they do not know what it means in this post-George Floyd reality.

What do we believe? What do we stand for as a community? As a City?



Mayor Turner, we thank you for your trust and the privilege to serve our community. We served with a rich sense of our City's history; for those who have come before us and fought for racial justice and equality; for the current generations that are engaged; and for those yet to be born.

This is a call for servant leaders from all sectors of our community to have "The Fierce Urgency of Now."¹

Submitted on this day, September 25, in the year 2020.

For Such a Time as This,²

Laurence J. "Larry" Payne
Chair, Mayor's Task Force on Policing Reform

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. **We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.** In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Societal governance is a sacred trust. Thus, laws and systems of government must originate from the highest moral and ethical principles and values to ensure equal treatment of and protection for every person.

Houston is sixteen years away from her bicentennial. On August 30, 2036, will Houston be a better place to live than it is today, or will it be worse? This is the key aspirational question that has guided our work.

Each shift, officers clad themselves in a bullet-proof vest and then strap a firearm on their hip as a part of donning the uniform. Those two pieces of equipment serve as twin reminders that policing is unique among the public services because as part of their service, police officers both risk their own lives and are authorized to exercise deadly force. We readily honor and esteem police officers for heeding this dangerous call to service. We also recognize that our task is to address problems in policing, especially those stemming from that power, indeed that too-often deadly power, granted to the police to do their work. The fact that confronts us in Houston in 2020 is that a Black person is roughly 3.4 times more likely to find themselves in the sights of that gun than is a White person.³ The lived experience of Black and Brown Houstonians points to a problem in the culture of policing that we believe mandates immediate reform within the Houston Police Department (“HPD”).

The key challenge ahead of us is to eliminate racism in policing. Without respect to the hearts or minds of individual officers, it is demonstrably true that there is racism embedded in how policing is effected across America and in Houston. Consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, our police officers play a role in a system that subjects Black and Brown persons to violence at a disproportionate rate. For these reasons, the system *in our City* requires reform.

In order to achieve the reforms our City needs, we recognize that law enforcement work must be reserved exclusively for exemplary citizens who prove worthy of the high honor and trust accorded the police. Falling short of this lofty ideal puts a civil society at risk. It subjects the public to implicit biases, invites abuses, and fosters distrust for law enforcement. Further, it undermines the peaceful coexistence of neighbors, creating chaos rather than community. We must have a police force that is responsible to the citizens of Houston *and* leads our nation in the highest virtues of policing.

This summer, following the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, the American conscience was awakened to systemic racism in policing.⁴ Those examples, and the numerous other recent prominent cases of police killings of Black people, reveal that our nation has an appalling problem in policing. This problem has not been held at bay by Houston’s city limits. Black people in Houston are more likely to be pulled over by police across the city.

Our region's police are more likely to use force against Black people during a traffic stop.⁵ Moreover in numerous conversations spawned by the work of the Task Force we asked Black men from across the socioeconomic strata and professional rungs of the ladder whether they had ever (1) been pulled over by the police when they had committed no crime and (2) whether the police had drawn their weapon on them. The answer was affirmative to both questions almost 100% of the time. Living with the constant concern that one might be pulled over and potentially shot is an anxiety-producing and weariness-inducing reality for Black citizens in general and Black men in particular. This is all to say, Black people and other minorities have borne the burden of unequal protection under the law.

Problems in policing are not restricted to Black people. In 1977, the HPD murder of Jose Campos Torres gripped the city.⁶ This year, the shootings of Nicholas Chavez, Christopher Aguirre, Adrian Medearis, Rayshard Scales, and Randy Lewis⁷—not to mention the Harding Street Raid⁸—all point to a need to address systemic racism and reform the HPD. Even HPD Chief Acevedo told our Task Force, “I am the Chief of Police and I get nervous when a police officer pulls behind me.”⁹

THE MORAL AND ETHICAL BASIS FOR CHANGE

Policing is an essential part of the sacred trust of government. Houston has six major faith traditions: Christianity,¹⁰ Judaism,¹¹ Islam,¹² Buddhism,¹³ Hinduism,¹⁴ and Sikhism.¹⁵ Each

tradition teaches the inherent dignity and worth of every person. Good people of every faith and of none hold the common ethical conviction that every person has value, deserves respect, and has the right to be treated fairly and equally. Furthermore, for a society to be ethical it must strive to have a fair system of justice. That justice must be administered and enforced in a manner such that no class or group of people is treated differently. All members of a society must feel protected and served by the representatives of the society, especially those who are authorized to carry weapons and exercise deadly force.

Houston has the potential to be “a city on a hill.”¹⁶ We are a model of industrious business success, and we are, in a very true sense, the future of the nation. Houston is in 2020 ethnically and demographically what America will be ethnically and demographically in 2050. We are a “majority-minority city” and the most ethnically diverse city in America, but our diversity has not yielded inclusivity. Policing reform is a critical step we must take to achieve the inclusivity required to be a great city. Recommendations on policing reform have been frequently accepted but rarely enacted.¹⁷ The results of the Task Force’s recommendations need to be applied lest we further demoralize our community. How many reports and task forces are needed before the HPD is accountable and reformed for the good? Moreover, what the Task Force is providing today is only the start. Beginning with dignity for each person we must imagine, enact, and work together to create **a safe city for all.**

—
A SAFE CITY FOR ALL;
IF WE DO NOT GO DEEP,
WE WILL NOT GO FAR.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	10
TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS	
 1: Community Policing	16
 2: Independent Oversight	30
 3: Power Dynamics	48
 4: Crisis Intervention	74
 5: Field Readiness	96
 6: Clear Expectations	120
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS	128
The Task Force	130
Acknowledgments	132
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: “For Such a Time as This”	134
Appendix B: “Must-reads on policing reform”	135
Appendix C: “Additional work on body-worn cameras (“BWC”)”	136
Appendix D: “Comparison of the HPD’s CIRT model to national standards”	142
Appendix E: “Other law enforcement collaborations with the HPD Mental Health Division”	144
NOTES AND CITATIONS	146

June 2020 was a busy month for Mayor Sylvester Turner.

On June 9th, he signed [Barack Obama's Mayor's Pledge](#), committing to "take action to address the concerns of Houstonians & to continually improve justice & equity for all." On June 10th, he signed [Executive Order 1-67 on Policing Reform: Use of Force](#), laying out several policing reform measures, such as banning the use of chokeholds, requiring officers to intervene if they see another officer using excessive force, and exhausting all reasonable alternatives before using deadly force. Additionally, as the second vice chair of the African American Mayors' Association, Mayor Turner vocally supported the [PEACE Pact](#) for Community Centered Policing, and on June 24th, announced the Mayor's Task Force on Policing Reform ("Task Force").

Mayor Turner gave the 45-member Task Force up to 90 days to make recommendations in police training, use of force, oversight, and interactions with the community. Officially, we were charged with reviewing: the current policies and practices of the Houston Police Department ("HPD"), including use of force, recruiting, training, and reporting; the operation of the Independent Police Oversight Board ("IPOB"); the use of a body-worn camera ("BWC") and associated release policies for video footage; the HPD's model of crisis intervention; and the HPD's approach to, and implementation of, community policing.

A critical charge, though not explicitly stated by the Mayor, was to listen to and engage with Houston community members. During this process, members of the Task Force spoke with numerous community stakeholders, including social services professionals, advocates, business leaders, youth, students, educators,





religious leaders, and community groups. We received letters and additional input from Houston City Council members, current and former HPD Chiefs and Executive Assistant Chiefs, current and former IPOB members, alumni of local Black fraternity chapters, current HPD officers, current Houston Police Officers' Union ("HPOU") members, youth members of Houston Peace, and others. Additionally, the Houston Area Urban League and Houston Peace both took the initiative to create their own community input surveys, and generously shared their results with the Task Force.

One of our most valued resources was the collection of over 7,000 stories and recommendations from Houston residents. On July 31st, the Task Force launched a questionnaire, asking Houstonians to provide their views on the HPD and whether they would recommend any improvements to the HPD. We initially planned to keep the survey live for one week, but, after receiving an overwhelming response from the community, we kept the survey open for three weeks. Houstonians had the option to respond in five different languages and received the survey link from roughly 100 different community organizations, social media, City Council members, and word of mouth.

While the survey responses are not considered statistically significant (given the lack of budget required to reach a representative sample), the stories made a significant impact on us. In a meeting with the HPD Chiefs, each Task Force member stood up and read a Houstonian's story out loud. These stories and suggestions helped guide and confirm our collective ideas and recommendations.

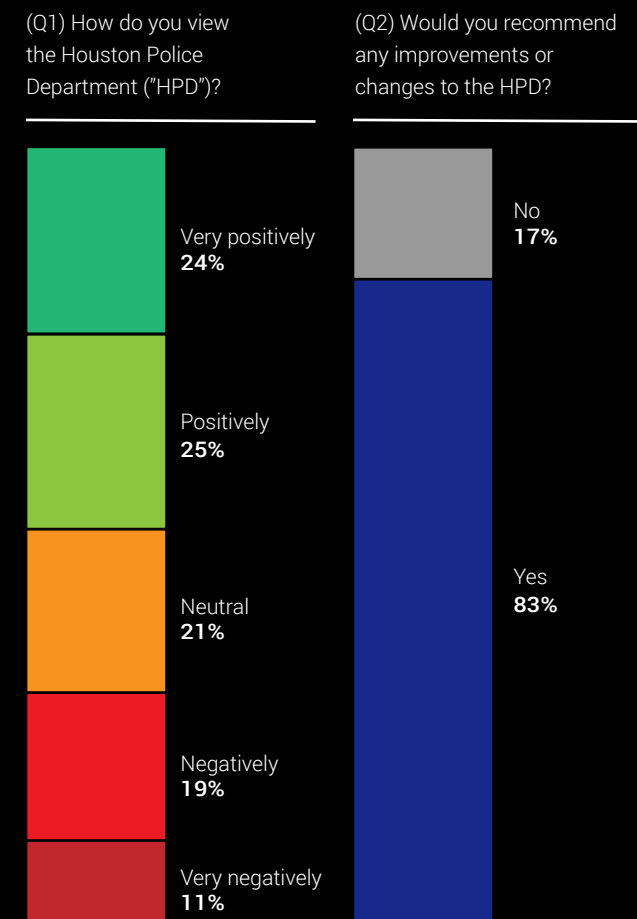
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Of the 7,302 responses, 24% view the HPD “Very Positively,” 25% “Positively,” 21% “Neutral,” 19% “Negatively,” and 11% “Very Negatively.” Critically, desire for improvement and reform do not come from just those who hold negative perceptions of the department. In fact, of those who view the HPD “Very Positively,” “Positively,” or “Neutral,” 76% believe that improvements are needed.

This finding reinforces our belief that asking for bold changes and reforms should not be viewed as disrespectful, ungrateful, or political in regard to law enforcement. Any organization should strive to create better outcomes for their stakeholders.

We believe our proposals will help balance the scale; at the end of the day, we want both the HPD officer and the civilian to go home to their families. Policing should not be interpreted as an “either/or” relationship. It is a “both/and” relationship that requires and deserves mutual respect, partnership, and understanding.

Fig 1. Results from Citywide survey show overwhelming support of Houstonians (83%) for improvements or changes to the HPD



RECOMMENDATIONS

This report urges Mayor Turner, the Houston City Council, and the HPD to take action. We ask them to reimagine Houston public safety by implementing the following reforms:

1: COMMUNITY POLICING

Integrate respectful, consistent, and meaningful community engagement and input into existing work practices, including recruiting, training, patrolling, and promoting.

2: INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT

Overhaul the current IPOB to support a full-time, paid administrative and investigative staff, accompanied by a diverse civilian board, to hold the HPD accountable to a higher standard.

3: POWER DYNAMICS

Balance the power dynamics between the HPD and Houstonians by releasing body-worn camera footage of critical incidents in a consistent and timely manner, further restricting the use of force, treating people with due respect, and committing to fundamental transparency by releasing audit and performance data on a regular basis.

4: CRISIS INTERVENTION

Expand existing partnerships between the HPD, mental health professionals, and social services organizations to lighten the load on officers when responding to vulnerable populations, such as those experiencing mental health crises, domestic violence, human trafficking, substance abuse, and homelessness.

5: FIELD READINESS

Equip and prepare officers for better engagement in the field through initiatives like reviewing and updating officer training, expanding mental health and wellness programs for officers, and instituting a mentorship program.

6: CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Set clear and unambiguous expectations for officers so that they feel supported, know exactly what behavior is required, and understand the consequences of their action or inaction.

There are a few things to keep in mind when reading through the report:

- 1. When we use the term “diversity,” unless otherwise noted, we mean the full spectrum of diverse communities in the City of Houston.**
This means diversity along the dimensions of race, age, religious beliefs, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender expression and identity, national origin, socioeconomic status, education level, ability, political beliefs, and immigration status.
- 2. This series of reforms is written for the City of Houston.**
Every city is different. While we have incorporated national best practices and inspiration from other cities’ reports, all recommendations have been specifically tailored to our City.
- 3. Necessary budget and funding were beyond the scope of the Task Force.**
We acknowledge that some of our recommendations will require additional funding and recognize fundraising as a critical step toward implementation. That said, we implore the Mayor, City Council, and the HPD to explore partnerships, grant applications, and otherwise exhaust other reasonable options before declaring that something cannot be done due to a lack of funding.
- 4. It is critical to track the implementation and subsequent effects of reforms.**
It is not enough to pledge to take action; action must be monitored, and results must be analyzed to ensure accountability and positive impact.
- 5. This is just the beginning.**
Some of these reforms can be implemented within 90 days. Some may take a year or longer. This is just the first step in an evolving, long-term partnership that will continue to require community and law enforcement collaboration.

Finally, to all Houstonians: to those who live here; those who work here; those who are from here; those who call this City home.

This report is for you.

Yes, the Mayor and City Council members and other civic leaders will read this. But, you’ll find that every section is written and designed for Houston community members, including our police officers. Your stories and suggestions are woven into this document. Some of us, too, have been marching in the streets. Some of us, too, have signed petitions, demanded change, and called for justice. We hope that you will stand with us now as we urge our leaders for change to create **a safe city for all.**

“The policing mindset has to change. Too often, I hear police speaking of their jobs as “us vs. them.”

But, real respect doesn't come from holding a weapon. It comes from having earned that respect.”

—TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

— COMMUNITY POLICING

Integrate respectful, consistent, and meaningful community engagement and input into existing work practices, including recruiting, training, patrolling, and promoting.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY POLICING?

Community policing, as defined by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights,¹⁸ is a method of policing that:

- Engages all community members in meaningful decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of departmental policies, practices, and priorities.
- Values community perspectives, especially of those most impacted by policing.
- Emphasizes prevention and problem-solving over arrests and criminalization.
- Promotes fair and equal treatment of all community members.

Community policing recognizes that the police can rarely solve all public safety problems alone. This approach to policing encourages interactive and collaborative partnerships with the community to accomplish two complementary goals:

1. Improve public safety.
2. Strengthen public trust.

In this section, we will discuss ways in which the HPD can more actively engage in community policing practices.

DO WE PRACTICE COMMUNITY POLICING IN HOUSTON?

Yes. In fact, Houston holds a unique place in the history of community policing. Dr. Lee P. Brown, the former Chief of HPD (and the City's first African American Chief) and former Mayor of Houston, literally wrote the book on community policing, entitled *Policing in the 21st Century: Community Policing*. Dr. Brown defined community policing (or "Neighborhood Oriented Policing") as "an interactive process between police officers assigned to specific beats and the civilians that either work or reside in these beats to mutually develop ways to identify problems and concerns and then assess viable solutions." Dr. Brown called this method of policing "a partnership," and under his leadership, the department made several advances, including:

- Diversified the HPD to better reflect the overall diversity of Houston.
- Established the Positive Interaction Program ("PIP") to involve civilians in fighting crime by establishing committees in selected areas.
- Created more patrol units that conducted their duties outside of a vehicle, including the Mounted Patrol and the Park Police.
- Mandated annual in-service training hours for existing officers.

I'VE HEARD CHIEF ACEVEDO TALK ABOUT "RELATIONAL POLICING." IS THAT THE SAME AS COMMUNITY POLICING?

The Task Force believes it is similar, if not mostly the same. As Chief Acevedo describes it, "relational policing" is "an opportunity to forge a relationship with each and every person an HPD member comes in contact with" by "treating people the way you would want to be treated." This philosophy is included in the HPD's training curriculum with the acronym "TREAT" (Transparency, Respect, Engagement, Accountability, and Trust). After speaking with Chief Acevedo, he shared that he was hesitant to use the term community policing because too many departments think of it as programming that requires additional funding (and therefore without additional funding, they will not do it). While we agree that funding should not be used as an excuse to stop reaching out to the community, we do think relational policing needs to encompass both respect and community outreach and partnerships.

The HPD shared the following examples of relational policing initiatives currently in practice:

1. [Houston Citizens Police Academy](#) ("HCPA") offers Houstonians an opportunity to learn about the internal operations of HPD.
2. [Police and Clergy Alliance](#) ("PACA") is a volunteer program for clergy and laypersons of various faiths and religious beliefs to work with the department to

build trust and respect with the public to facilitate law enforcement.

3. [Greater Houston Police Activities League](#) (“GHPAL”) is a partnership with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department that provides year-round youth sports for Houstonians ages 9-17.
4. [“Comunidad y Confianza”](#) is a Spanish Radio Show with “The Triple C Podcast” that utilizes mass media to augment and enhance the normal response to daily crime and civility issues faced by residents of Houston.
5. [Community Liaison Officers](#) are full-time officers assigned to special interest groups throughout the City.
6. [Houston Law Enforcement Alliance of Pride](#) (“LEAP”) is a group of LGBTQ+ and ally law enforcement officers and civilians that provides a safe environment for members to voice issues and receive support.
7. [Communicators on Patrol](#) is a group of volunteers from the community that are recruited to enhance language access between HPD officers and civilians. The volunteers assist patrol officers “on the scene” by handling communications and translations for several languages.

IF THE HPD ALREADY OPERATES THESE PROGRAMS, DO THEY REALLY NEED TO DO MORE?

The Task Force is not necessarily advocating for more *programming*. Instead, we are advocating for the HPD to do more to *integrate community voices into their daily work*, including during recruiting, training, patrolling, and promoting.

Existing community policing programs are structured for the community to interact with law enforcement at a physical location, such as a command center, or on a call hosted by community groups. Communities with preexisting tensions and fractured relationships with law enforcement are less likely to take the initiative to join a Super Neighborhood call or PIP meeting. Therefore, initiatives created to induce community partnerships should be structured for police officers to proactively engage with community members.

“I’d like them to be intentional about building relationships... actually being part of the community so that they are viewed as community members who are invested in the lives and successes of all residents.”

—HOUSTON AREA URBAN LEAGUE SURVEY RESPONDENT

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS THE HPD CAN TAKE TO IMPROVE ITS COMMITMENT TO AND EXECUTION OF RELATIONAL POLICING?

01

Incorporate up to three weeks of community engagement into cadet training.

The Task Force believes that one of the most important outcomes of officer training is for an officer to know, appreciate, and appropriately respond to the individuals, communities, and neighborhoods they will serve. Currently, the only community engagement that prospective cadets receive outside of the classroom is an eight hour “Multiculturalism / Diversity Neighborhood Tour.” A one-day neighborhood tour of Houston communities can hardly be considered enough time for officers to really get to know communities different from their own.

The Task Force recommends expanding cadet training by three weeks so that each recruit can be paired with a community organization in Houston for a three-week “externship.” For example, a recruit might work with the Houston Area Women’s Center, shadowing staff, speaking with domestic violence experts, and getting to know people who have been in domestic abuse situations. A recruit might be paired with Star of Hope to get to know members of the homeless community while serving meals, or work at the Houston Area Urban League’s Economic Empowerment Center to better understand the needs of minority business owners.

Community collaborations such as these will enable cadets to gain compassionate exposure to groups of Houstonians who may not look or live like them, while also organically developing community partnerships prior to moving into their full-time positions.

02

Include out-of-the-classroom activities into people- and place-based training.

The Academy should utilize multidisciplinary teaching teams and experiential learning to complement traditional lecture-style training. For example, at the New Haven Police Department, “The Sex Industry Workers” course is taught by a Yale professor, three prostitutes, and a police officer, and the “Domestic Violence” course is taught by a prosecutor, a resident from a local shelter, and a court-appointed victim’s advocate.”¹⁹

When it comes to experiential learning, traditional classroom lectures on mental illness, for example, could be supplemented by interviews with people who have mental health service needs, visits to mental health service facilities like The Harris Center’s Mental Health Diversion Center, and meetings with families or caregivers.

03

Include a “Community Engagement” section on patrol Work Cards to ensure civilian and business engagement takes place. Require officers to make personal contact with at least two people or businesses during each shift.

Patrol activity sheets have record options for arrest activity but no record options for community engagement. Chief Acevedo plans to require officers to have at least two out-of-car engagements with civilians and/or businesses during each patrol shift, and the Task Force supports this initiative. This effort will help the HPD proactively reach out and engage with civilians who might not be those present at structured meetings or neighborhood town halls.

04

Update the promotion process to include a third component: an internal panel with community representation.

Currently, there are two components in the promotion process for police officers: a written examination and an assessment component conducted by a third-party assessor. In conversations with the Task Force, Chief Acevedo shared his recommendation to include an additional third component. He and the Task Force recommend adding an internal interview, during which an officer would share their resume, their statement of qualifications, and answer questions.

Following the interview, a small internal panel of officers and a community representative would make the final call, taking into account all three components. Inviting community members to participate adds diversity and transparency to the process, strengthening community trust in the system.

05

Partner with local research agencies and/or universities to conduct regular community input surveys and publish the results publicly.

Collaborations with agencies and local colleges/universities can be a start in creating and conducting surveys within respective communities. Similar to the Census, surveys can be conducted based on ZIP codes, and information gathered will measure effectiveness of police strategies, community views toward and trust in the HPD, and suggestions for improvement.

These surveys can help the HPD better understand how perceptions vary by neighborhood, age, race, gender, and other characteristics, allowing them to update strategies or invest resources accordingly. Actions that the HPD takes in response to the surveys should be shared publicly so that the community is aware of their impact.

06

Devise specific ways of measuring the impact of relational policing, including but not limited to: credibility with the community, number and type of civilian complaints, crime rates, number of fatal shootings of unarmed civilians, and response time.

Using specific metrics will hold the HPD accountable to the community and help the HPD make more effective investments of their resources and time. For all of the relational policing programs described above (e.g., PACA or GHPAL), the HPD should provide public, annual reports on the activities, successes, and improvements made to each program.

WHAT ADDITIONAL INITIATIVES CAN THE HPD TAKE TO ENSURE THEY CONTINUE TO UPHOLD THEIR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONAL POLICING?

07

Contract with a technology company that will allow people to provide real-time feedback about their experiences with HPD officers.

Chief Acevedo shared that the HPD is meeting with companies to identify opportunities to solicit civilian feedback on officer interactions (e.g., a text message or email asking, “How did we do?” once a case is cleared). Similar to how ride-sharing or food delivery services ask for real-time feedback, this initiative will give the community an immediate opportunity to provide comments on their interaction with HPD officers. This feedback could also be incorporated into officer evaluations and the promotion process.

08

Include a “bonus point” in promotion considerations for those who have a history of community involvement, service, or leadership.

Creating an incentive structure for community-based activities and achievements demonstrates that public engagement is just as important as any other policing activity. Further, acknowledging community engagement in the promotion process solidifies participation in the community as an integral part of the department’s culture. The New Haven Police Department gives officers up to four extra points for longstanding involvement or a leadership role in the community. Some agencies, such as the Pueblo County Sheriff’s Department, take this notion a step further, mandating demonstrated, ongoing community service as a prerequisite to promotion.²⁰

09

Create a residency incentive program to encourage HPD officers to reside in the City of Houston.

Residency incentives can help affirm the connection between officers and the communities they serve. While there is no scientific proof that the requirements have created a better police force, officers who live in Houston neighborhoods have the opportunity to play a more active role in our communities by living in them. Incentives could include reduced home loan rates for officers within city limits and/or increased salary packages, with the stipulation that community involvement is required.

10

Ask for community input and feedback on recruiting materials to ensure resonant messaging.

The HPD can invite community members from diverse backgrounds to participate in focus groups that evaluate different HPD recruiting slogans, images, and approaches. Focus group members can also help develop recruiting strategies directed toward specific communities, sponsor officer presentations, and serve as HPD ambassadors within the community.

11

Assign officers to neighborhoods on a long-term basis.

Stability is essential to developing positive relationships and building trust. A stable assignment provides officers an opportunity to learn more about and participate more fully in the life of the community.

12

When a long-term officer changes assignment, provide a transition plan and make sure the new officer is properly introduced to the neighborhood.

Sometimes, civilians in certain communities build deep bonds with and rely on long-serving officers. To address this, HPD should develop transition plans that are communicated to the neighborhood and allow overlapping time for the outgoing and incoming officers to serve together. The outgoing officer can help introduce the incoming officer to community members, share institutional knowledge, and make the transition easier for both parties.

13

Continue to host informational meetings (Positive Interaction Program meetings, "PIP") with the community on a consistent, quarterly basis in each Super Neighborhood.

Though not all residents will show up, consistency is essential to continue to establish open, two-way communication and trust. Neighborhood leaders and participants will be able to share input with officers and learn about officer activities and initiatives.

14

Take PIP a step forward by creating specialized support teams in each Super Neighborhood to help identify recurring neighborhood problems and brainstorm solutions.

For example, the San Diego Police Department created Neighborhood Police Support Teams to help officers identify recurring neighborhood problems and think beyond their usual reactive responses to developing long-term solutions.²¹ Forming this type of team could be as straightforward as including civilian representation on the HPD's existing [Differential Response Teams](#).

15

Utilize grant funds in creative, productive ways that benefit the community.

Police departments typically receive outside funding, such as US Department of Justice grants, to support their community-based efforts. The HPD could use these grants to award its own sub-grants to local community groups who submit specific plans for assisting in crime prevention or advancing community policing efforts.

16

Pilot a “mobile storefront” concept in which a small team of officers park in different neighborhoods across Houston, specifically to interact with residents and listen to their input.

Instead of adding more brick-and-mortar storefronts in select areas, test out one or two mobile storefronts that drive into different communities. Officers should be present to encourage resident interaction and listen to community needs. As a pilot test, it will be critical to measure the impact of this initiative before investing in any expansion.

”

I am intimidated by [the police] because I never see them inside the community—only when accidents happen and tickets are...written. I want a relationship with my local police force. I don't think I should be afraid or dislike them, but they don't seem like part of the community.”

—TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

KEY TAKEAWAY

Through community partnerships, shared problem-solving, and proactive engagement, the HPD can advance public safety and strengthen community trust.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Task Force has taken the initiative to suggest time frames for the implementation of each reform detailed in this section. At a minimum, we would expect a status update on these recommendations within the given range.

SHORT TERM
WITHIN 90 DAYS

—

- 03:** Personal contact on patrol
- 05:** Community input surveys
- 06:** Measurements for relational policing
- 08:** “Bonus point” for promotion
- 10:** Community input on recruiting
- 11:** Long-term assignments
- 12:** Transition planning
- 13:** PIP meetings
- 15:** Grant funds
- 16:** “Mobile storefronts”

MEDIUM TERM
WITHIN 6-12 MONTHS

—

- 01:** Community engagement in cadet training
- 02:** Out-of-classroom learning
- 04:** Promotion process
- 07:** Real-time feedback
- 09:** Residency incentive program
- 14:** Neighborhood police support teams

LONG TERM
1 YEAR+

—

N/A - continue to build on proposed initiatives

INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT

Overhaul the current IPOB to support a full-time, paid administrative and investigative staff, accompanied by a diverse civilian board, to hold the HPD accountable to higher standards.

WHAT IS THE IPOB AND WHEN WAS IT CREATED?

The Independent Police Oversight Board (“IPOB”) is a group of 21 volunteer citizens tasked with reviewing the HPD’s completed internal affairs investigations involving a death in custody, allegations of excessive force, or discharge of a weapon. The current Board is composed of four panels (A, B, C, and D) of five citizens. The full Board is led by a single chair, and each panel has a panel chair. In its current form, the IPOB is not an investigative agency and has no budget, staff, disciplinary authority, or investigative tools. The IPOB only provides independent review of what the HPD investigations reveal to have occurred.

The IPOB’s origins can be traced to the 1977 murder of Jose Campos Torres. Mr. Torres was a 23-year-old Mexican American Vietnam War veteran who, after being arrested for disorderly conduct, was severely beaten and thrown into Buffalo Bayou by six HPD officers. Two of the officers received minimal sentencing (a one-year probation and a \$1 fine) and eventually, nine-month sentences in federal prison. On the anniversary of Mr. Torres’ death, the Houston community reacted with outrage, leading to the

1978 Moody Park Riot, one of the most violent riots in the City’s history. Following the riot, HPD’s Chief of Police Harry Caldwell created the Internal Affairs Division (“IAD”) to investigate allegations of serious police mistreatment of civilians.

A decade later, in 1989, the separate killings of Ida Lee Delaney and Bryon Gillium by police officers led Mayor Kathy Whitmire to establish a volunteer Citizens Review Committee (“CRC”) to determine whether IAD investigations into complaints of police brutality and excessive force were complete, their conclusions correct, and the disciplinary recommendations appropriate.

Then, in 2011, security camera footage was released showing a dozen HPD officers beating an unarmed 15-year-old student named Chad Holley. This incident again sparked community and national outrage, leading Mayor Annise Parker to propose a “sweeping package of new initiatives aimed at restoring public trust in the HPD.” The package included creation of the IPOB to replace the CRC.

A GROUP OF CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS SAID RECENTLY THAT THEY “HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE CURRENT FORMAT” OF THE IPOB. WHAT DOES THE TASK FORCE THINK?

We agree. The current model contains several structural and legal impediments which have hindered (and in some cases, entirely prevented) the IPOB from meaningfully discharging its functions and achieving its intended effect.

The IPOB also fails to fulfill all of its duties, as outlined in [Executive Order \(“EO”\) 1-5](#). The EO assigns the IPOB responsibilities in assessing the recruitment, training, and evaluation of police officers and in offering substantial involvement in community outreach. However, those functions have not been performed. The EO also provides for considerable participation in the independent oversight process by the City’s Inspector General, though that function, too, has been generally unfulfilled.

It is important to realize that the IPOB—at its core—is not, and was never modeled to be, an investigative agency. The Task Force recommends changing the IPOB from a review model to an investigative model.

TELL ME ABOUT THE DIFFERENT MODELS OF CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT.

There are five common goals of civilian oversight of police activities:

1. Improve public trust
2. Promote thorough, fair investigations
3. Deter police misconduct
4. Ensure accessible complaint processes
5. Increase transparency

The National Association of Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (“NACOLE”) has identified three types of civilian oversight structures for achieving these objectives:

Auditor/Monitor Model: This model calls for a review of the completeness and thoroughness of IAD investigations, or a monitoring of the entire internal investigations from beginning to end. Monitoring is conducted by an agency or public official unrelated to the police department or other law enforcement entity.

Investigative Model: This model generally involves a publicly funded agency which investigates complaints of police misconduct independently of the police department itself.

Review Focused Model: This model involves a civilian board or panel, composed of unpaid, volunteer members of the community. The board examines the quality of internal affairs investigations and the conclusions and recommendations resulting from inquiries conducted by the department.

WHAT MODEL DOES THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND?

For the IPOB to achieve its fundamental purpose—to hold the HPD accountable to the public—the Board must be reconstituted as a new organization with investigatory powers.

The Task Force concludes that a hybrid model, utilizing a full-time, paid professional staff accompanied by a diverse, volunteer civilian board, is best suited for Houston. The loss of public trust and credibility makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the police to forge partnerships in local communities, let alone expect community cooperation in criminal investigations. This model will work to rebuild community confidence by holding police officers accountable through effective, transparent, and independent oversight.

We recommend the following criteria be considered when rebuilding the IPOB:

1. The IPOB needs to have its own funding and budget, including funds and facilities for professional investigative and administrative staff, separate from and independent of the HPD's funding and budget.

The investigative staff shall be dedicated to independent investigation of instances of police misconduct. Staff shall also review existing and proposed HPD

policies, and recommend reforms related to HPD's recruiting, hiring, promotion, disciplinary, and termination measures.

The administrative staff shall be responsible for carrying out the Board's mission on a day-to-day basis, in addition to evaluating systemic issues and raising awareness of the Board in the community.

2. The paid staff and the civilian board shall have ample authority to investigate and review cases of police misconduct. Some might advocate for investigative tools such as subpoena power, though NACOLE advises, "if you are unable to [include subpoena power in the agency's enabling legislation], this is not a roadblock to effective civilian oversight."²²
3. The hybrid model will preserve diverse civilian involvement by accompanying the paid staff with a Civilian Review Board that is primarily responsible for reviewing civilian complaints against the HPD.

Clearly, additional measures and exact details for the future structure of the Board need to be duly considered. These recommendations should serve as the initial vision for the Mayor and/or future Mayors to craft a stronger Board for our City.

WHAT ADDITIONAL CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE, AT THE STATE OR CITY LEVEL, TO FURTHER IMPROVE THE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS?

01

Change the “180-day rule” from the date alleged police misconduct occurred to the date the misconduct was discovered by the department.

Under Chapter 143 of the Texas Local Government Code, law enforcement agencies have 180 days from the date that alleged misconduct occurred to impose discipline on an officer. However, acts of misconduct are not always reported to the department on the day of occurrence, meaning that departments can lose valuable time needed to fairly investigate incidents. Changing the rule to date of discovery will allow for more fair and thorough investigations.

02

Increase the time available for imposition of discipline upon officers found to have engaged in improper conduct from 180 days to 210 days.

This change to Chapter 143 of the Local Government Code is necessary to allow sufficient time for a thorough investigation and adequate deliberations by the IPOB.

03

Require officers involved in incidents in which their conduct is under scrutiny to make statements at the beginning of the investigation.

The current [“Meet and Confer”](#) agreement between the City and the HPOU needs to be changed. Current practice allows officers to defer making statements until after the investigation is complete and officers can read the entire file. Officers should be able to revise their original statements after reading the file, but not to postpone making an initial statement. Current policy may lead to a tainted and untrustworthy investigation.

04

Address the serious inherent pro-police bias and unavoidable conflict of interest resulting from the symbiotic relationship between the District Attorney's ("DA") Office and the HPD.

DAs rely on police for assistance in successfully prosecuting cases. This relationship may cause DAs to avoid aggressive prosecution of the very officers on whom they are dependent. This issue can begin to be addressed by establishing an independent agency to prosecute cases of police abuse and misconduct, separate from the DA's Office.

05

Allow authorized IPOB members to report observations and results of investigations to the community (without revealing names of particular officers or victims of police abuse).

If the charge of the IPOB is to provide increased accountability and transparency to benefit the residents of Houston, then IPOB members should have a duty to share results, feedback, and recommendations with the public, including the Mayor and City Council.

06

Allow convicted felons (who have fully completed terms of punishment) to serve on the IPOB.

To represent the entirety of the Houston community, the IPOB should include members of the community who have had experience with police and the criminal justice system, including formerly incarcerated civilians and others who have had both positive and negative experiences with law enforcement.

07

Allow Green Card holders and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”) recipients to serve on the IPOB.

Because input from the immigrant community is especially important in Houston, these residents would also aid in representing the entirety of the Houston community.

Police cannot police themselves. Develop permanent, independent boards to review incidents of police corruption and brutality—and then fund them well and support them publicly. Only this can change a culture that has existed since the beginnings of the modern police department.”

—TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

DO ANY IMPROVEMENTS NEED TO BE MADE TO THE COMMUNITY COMPLAINT PROCESS?

Yes. In order for the public to perceive police oversight as credible, the complaint process must be accessible, efficient, and transparent.

08

Allow community members to submit complaints online.

With respect to methods of filing a complaint, the more options available, the better. Currently, people can submit complaints in person at any police substation, at the Internal Affairs/Central Intake Office, or at community organizations. There is also a mail-in option, which requires notarization; however, no option currently exists for residents who wish to submit a complaint online.

09

Ensure community members can still submit complaints in-person at community organizations.

The HPD website states that residents can submit complaints at local community organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (“NAACP”) and League of United Latin American Citizens (“LULAC”). However, after speaking with current and former IPOB members and Houston residents, it appears those procedures have fallen into disuse. They should be re-implemented and advertised so that local community members are aware of their options.

10

Translate and accept complaint forms in multiple languages.

Houston residents speak over 145 languages, the third largest number of languages spoken in a US city behind New York (192) and Los Angeles (185).²³ Online forms can be dynamically translated as needed for residents who are more comfortable using a non-English language.

11

Communicate in a transparent and timely fashion with people who have filed a complaint.

A formal system should be implemented to confirm receipt of civilians’ complaints. They should also be promptly informed of the result of their complaint and of any action taken upon conclusion of an investigation, to the extent consistent with legal constraints. A full-time staff who can serve as a personal point of contact for civilians going through the complaint process will help reinforce trust in the system.

WHILE TIME IS TAKEN TO FIND FUNDING FOR SUCH A BOARD, WHAT CAN BE DONE IMMEDIATELY TO REFORM THE IPOB?

In the next 90 days, the following changes should be made to the IPOB, in preparation for the independent investigative agency as described above:

Take steps to ensure a balanced, fair culture

As Dr. Kristen Anderson (a former IPOB member) stated in her open letter to the public, “far too many Board members are uncritical boosters of the police and policing, sometimes shamelessly so, which hinders their ability to fairly evaluate officer conduct.”

Additionally, IPOB members’ recent support of the four HPD officers who shot Houston resident, Nicolas Chavez, 21 times confirms our belief that the IPOB’s culture must be fundamentally overhauled. It is distressing to the Task Force that the civilians put in place to hold officers accountable would defend these officers’ actions when even the Chief of Police himself said that he “cannot defend [the officers’] actions” and deemed their use of force “not objectively reasonable.”²⁴

12

Replace the current IPOB chair and panel chairs. Institute staggered term limits to ensure fresh ideas.

The current IPOB chair and panel chairs are well-intentioned, dedicated, and hard-working, but are not optimally suited by background for their roles. And, in some cases, they have served too long in their roles to bring renewed perspectives. In order to dramatically transform the civilian oversight process—and to signal that transformation to the community—the current chairs should be replaced.

13

Revamp the method for appointing IPOB members to allow community organizations to make recommendations, in addition to relying on City Council members.

Current IPOB member recruiting practices result in disproportionate pro-police predisposition and influence on the IPOB, the result of politically biased member appointments. The composition of the Board must be taken into account to achieve a more appropriate mixture of viewpoints. As recommended by the Boston Police Reform Task Force, “the Mayor should appoint its members from a pool of applicants recommended by civil rights advocacy groups, youth organizations, neighborhood organizations,” faith organizations, and existing members.

14

Do not include criminal or police records of individuals in the files turned over to the IPOB.

Too often, panel members justify or excuse abusive and unacceptable police conduct because the civilian had a criminal history (“This was a bad guy who deserved to be treated that way.”). While human bias is to be expected, allowing those biases to influence decision-making results in unjustified exonerations, emboldening future police misconduct. Panels may request this information only if they believe it critical to make an informed decision.

15

Train IPOB members when they first join and on an annual basis by a training entity unaffiliated with the HPD or another law enforcement entity.

IPOB members are supposed to receive training, but often do not. For those who did receive training, courses were led by the HPOU or another affiliated party. An independent training group should be evaluated and selected to train members both at the beginning of their terms and on an annual basis.

Expand the existing workforce

Limited resources and staffing have curtailed the IPOB's ability to fulfill its current list of responsibilities, leaving the Board to focus only on reviewing completed IAD investigations.

16

Create a Deputy Inspector General ("DIG") position with necessary support staff and facilities dedicated exclusively to matters relating to the HPD and IPOB.

This would include budget, waste and fraud, discrimination, and all other matters involving the HPD, including IPOB and civilian complaint issues. The DIG should far more proactively function as an "ombudsman for citizens with allegations of police misconduct and to assist, in a confidential manner, regarding the making or filing of a complaint against any HPD officer," as the EO and the City's website promise. The DIG should advocate fairly for members of the public complaining about police mistreatment and steer individuals' complaints through the investigative process.

17

The IPOB should be expanded by ten members, creating two additional panels.

One new panel should focus on recruitment of new officers, training, and evaluations, as EO 1-5 provides (currently not being done). The second panel should be responsible for random reviews of body-worn camera ("BWC") footage (currently referred to as "BWC audits").

These duties could be rotated such that each of the six panels would be assigned both "recruitment, training, and evaluation" review duties and "BWC audit" duties throughout the year, while continuing to perform internal investigations reviews.

Increase community awareness

Communities are ultimately the force for change, and it is only through the community's awareness and participation that we will achieve the promise of fair and transparent oversight.

18

The IPOB should develop and implement specific plans for extensive community outreach.

This community outreach plan should include, but is not limited to the following initiatives:

- Listen to and monitor community concerns on a regular, defined basis.
- Report community concerns to the Chief of Police, both formally (in writing) and verbally (in regular, periodic meetings with the Chief).
- Follow up with the HPD to assure due consideration is being given to the concerns of the community.
- Report back to the community on what is being done to address its concerns (with due regard to privacy concerns, confidentiality requirements, and constraints posed by ongoing legal proceedings).
- Inform the community on how to submit complaints about police misconduct.
- Raise the profile of the IPOB in the community.
- Function as a liaison between the community and the HPD.

19

Create an improved website for the IPOB.

The current website is difficult to navigate, making it hard for people to learn more about and engage with the IPOB.

—

Establish regular contact with the Chief of Police, the Mayor, and City Council

As IPOB members are likely some of the most informed civilians on addressable patterns of behavior in policing, they should be in regular contact with those leaders most likely to affect change.

20

The Chief of Police should establish a specific process to receive recommendations directly from the IPOB and should provide a prompt response to the IPOB panel concerning what action(s) has been or will be taken in response.

21

Revisions to General Orders proposed by IPOB panels should be taken seriously, acknowledged by the Chief of Police, and acted upon promptly. The IPOB should receive timely notification of any action taken on such proposal(s).

22

Submit quarterly reports to the Mayor and to the Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee of City Council.

These reports should outline systemic problems observed, recommend reforms to HPD practices and procedures, and suggest ways to continue to improve police-community relations. Each panel should submit a separate report.

Implement process improvements

Common-sense improvements can be made to ensure the IPOB runs more smoothly.

23

Update the EO to allow IPOB panels 30 days to review assigned files.

Fourteen days is insufficient for five volunteer citizens with full-time jobs and other commitments to review multiple files thoroughly, meet to discuss the matter, and request additional information as needed.

24

Require an IAD officer to be immediately available during IPOB panel meetings to answer case-related questions.

Currently, if questions about the case arise, panel members must wait for a reply from IAD, potentially jeopardizing the fourteen-day time frame for case review.

25

Share responsibility for service on the Administrative Disciplinary Committee (“ADC”).

The ADC is “an internal committee responsible for reviewing investigations containing sustained allegations and making a disciplinary recommendation to the Chief of Police.” Instead of requiring only the chairs to serve on the ADC, panel members should share that responsibility on a rotating basis, with each member serving three months on the ADC per year. While this might deprive the ADC of some institutional consistency, it would reduce the time commitment demanded from those volunteers and diversify participation in the process.

26

Include autopsy reports in death cases.

Panels are frequently required to make determinations in death cases without seeing a copy of the autopsy report. Without access to autopsy reports in death cases, investigations remain inadequate.

27

IAD should make every effort to provide a balanced representation of the facts of the investigation.

Past IPOB members have shared that the recommendations from the IAD “feel like narratives or advocacy pieces written on behalf of and defending the police.” Objective reports will help ensure a more balanced perspective that duly contemplates the actions of both sides.

28

Institute an annual audit of the IPOB to ensure compliance with policies and implementation of best practices as they arise.

Dr. Anderson’s letter stated that certain responsibilities had not been fulfilled for all nine years she served on the IPOB. Waiting nine years to uncover unfulfilled responsibilities is unacceptable.

29

Update the EO to allow panels to conduct meetings virtually.

At least until the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided locally, IPOB panels should be authorized to conduct meetings virtually.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Task Force urges the Mayor to fundamentally overhaul the current IPOB by switching from a monitor model with civilian volunteers to an independent, investigatory model with full-time, paid staff, reporting to the Mayor. We understand that finding funding for such a model may take time, so we have also recommended short-term changes that will help improve the fairness and accountability of the IPOB. To be clear, these recommendations are not “either/or.” Simply executing the short-term wins will not satisfy the Task Force’s call to action. Rather, the provided short-term recommendations lay a requisite foundation for our longer-term vision to succeed.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Task Force has taken the initiative to suggest time frames for the implementation of each reform detailed in this section. At a minimum, we would expect a status update on these recommendations within the given range.

SHORT TERM WITHIN 90 DAYS

—

- 03:** Policy on officer statements
- 08:** Online complaints
- 09:** In-person complaints
- 10:** Multiple languages
- 11:** Complaint response

Recommendations **12-29**
(immediate reforms)

MEDIUM TERM WITHIN 6-12 MONTHS

—

- 01:** “180 day rule”
- 02:** Timeframe for disciplinary action
- 05:** Reporting to the community

LONG TERM 1 YEAR+

—

- Fully enact a hybrid-model IPOB
- 04:** DA conflict of interest
- 06:** Convicted felons
- 07:** Green card holders and DACA recipients

POWER DYNAMICS

Balance the power dynamics between the HPD and Houstonians by releasing body-worn camera footage of critical incidents in a consistent and timely manner, further restricting the use of force, treating people with due respect, and committing to fundamental transparency by releasing audit and performance data on a regular basis.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN OUR DISCUSSION OF 'POWER DYNAMICS'?

The power imbalance inherent to the police-civilian relationship can threaten effective policing. Sustainable reform requires us to acknowledge the role that perceived power (and lack of power) plays in policing.

In this section, we will discuss four critical components to mitigating the effects of the power asymmetry that exists between the HPD and Houstonians.

Specifically, we focus our discussion on:

- A. The use of **body-worn cameras ("BWC")** and the policies that guide video release
- B. The HPD's **use of force** and the rules that govern police engagement with civilians
- C. The role of **trust and transparency** in holding the HPD accountable
- D. The core tenants of **respectful, equitable policing**

In each of the following sections, we will share the Task Force's recommendations for advancing the HPD's commitment to accountable, responsible, respectful, and transparent policing.

A) Enacting body-worn camera video release policies

Consistent use of a body-worn camera (“BWC”) in the field is only the first step. Withholding BWC video footage from the public after a critical incident does not fulfill the initial promise of transparency and accountability.

WHAT IS A BWC AND WHY DO OFFICERS USE THEM?

A BWC is a small camera that can be clipped onto a police officer’s uniform or worn as a headset and turned on to record video and audio of law enforcement encounters with the public. The video content is often saved with time and date stamps, as well as GPS coordinates. Though the technology has advanced over the years (e.g., some automatically turn on based on input triggers, some offer live-streaming capabilities), most BWCs—including the current ones used by the HPD—require officers to manually turn them on and off.

At the turn of the past decade, community stakeholders and criminal justice leaders called for law enforcement accountability and suggested the widespread use of BWCs on police officers. The aim was to improve relations between the community and law enforcement by ensuring accountability on both sides.²⁵ In response, many police departments started adopting BWC programs to improve the quality of policing in their communities and to alleviate the feelings of mistrust between the public and law enforcement.²⁶

TELL ME ABOUT BWCs IN HOUSTON.

The HPD began outfitting officers with BWCs in December 2013 when 100 cameras were purchased and distributed to officers in a pilot program.²⁷ Following the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, Houston Chief of Police Charles McClelland pushed for the department to be equipped with additional BWCs, with a planned deployment of 4,100 cameras over three consecutive years.²⁸ Chief McClelland and members of the community believed the technology could change the behavior of both officers and civilians, fostering more trust and accountability.

HPD’s current BWC policy, [General Order 400-28](#), has been publicly available on the department’s website since August 2017.²⁹

ARE THERE EXISTING POLICIES DESCRIBING THE RELEASE STANDARDS FOR BWC VIDEOS?

34 states across the United States have BWC programs and policies³⁰ to regulate the use of the technology; however, they rarely specify policies for the public release of BWC video footage.

Only eight states and/or cities have a set time frame for the release of BWC video footage to the public once requested. Even when policies allow public access to BWC footage, videos are often only released at the police chief's discretion, as is the case with the HPD.

WHY SHOULD POLICE DEPARTMENTS RELEASE BWC VIDEOS?

Releasing BWC footage can:

1. Show that the department is open and transparent to the public.
2. Increase public trust in the police department and its use of force investigations.
3. Help the public understand how and when force is used by the police, and what the department's policies do and do not permit officers to do.
4. Ensure that officers are held accountable if they use force inappropriately.
5. Provide more complete context, particularly if other videos (e.g., those from a cell phone camera) have been released publicly.
6. Correct any rumors or mis-perceptions that the public may have about what occurred.

IF BWC VIDEOS ARE SO IMPORTANT TO MAINTAINING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY, WHY DO DEPARTMENTS HESITATE TO RELEASE THE VIDEOS TO THE PUBLIC?

Releasing BWC videos publicly may:

1. Make it more difficult for the department to investigate the incident. Witnesses may report what they see on the video instead of what they actually remember or be less likely to come forward if they think the video tells the whole story.
2. Cause distress to family members of either the officer or the civilian involved, particularly if the video is graphic and shared widely by mainstream or social media.
3. Bias potential jurors in a criminal case against the officer or civilian involved.
4. Create public confusion about what occurred, particularly if the video only captures part of the incident.
5. Violate the privacy of the individuals captured in the recording, particularly if the incident takes place in a private home. BWCs may capture footage of children, people in various stages of undress, and victims of domestic violence or sexual assault.

WHAT DOES THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND REGARDING BWCs?

We contend that the timely and certain public release of BWC footage is in the public's best interest. We recognize that the release of BWC footage is a difficult and complex decision. The arguments above prove that there is not a straightforward answer in all cases. However, we have reached a turning point in which accountability must be externally imposed on police. As the [Justice Can't Wait](#) report states, "Police having exclusive control over, and then refusing to release, video of killings which are disproportionately of Black men, defeats the purpose of having body cameras and does significant harm to trust and confidence in the Houston Police Department and their relations with the community." The HPD should:

01

Implement clear and transparent dissemination timelines.

24 hours: In the event that a federal and/or state prosecuting authority opens an official investigation into a critical incident, the HPD should share all BWC footage with the prosecuting authority within 24 hours of the department being notified of the investigation.

30 days: In addition, the HPD should publicly release BWC footage of a critical incident, which includes display of excessive force and/or a death in custody, within 30 calendar days.

Seven days/24 hours: The HPD should notify the prosecuting authority seven calendar days prior to releasing BWC footage of a critical incident to the public, except when the Chief of Police determines that pressing circumstances require a shorter time period for release (e.g., in order to maintain public safety or preserve the peace). In such cases, notice should be provided to the prosecuting authority at a minimum of 24 hours prior to releasing BWC footage of a critical incident to the public.

02

Consider additional BWC video release criteria.

- Release representative samples of the BWC video(s) depicting the critical incident, as well as any salient events leading up to the event.
- Maintain unedited footage of a critical incident and release it to an appropriate investigating authority upon request.
- Update the existing HPD BWC policy to explicitly prohibit footage tampering and prescribe a penalty for such acts.

03

Share the BWC footage of a critical incident without redaction with the media and concerned parties (e.g., prosecution, lawyers, and family members).

The video(s) should also be made available on an accessible front-facing website designed to ensure transparency (taking into account restricting underage access and providing appropriate warning labels for graphic content).

04

Protect certain privacy concerns when releasing the BWC footage, such as the interior of residences and other places where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy or the location of a domestic violence program.

05

Implement the following redaction standards when releasing BWC footage:

- Comply with federal, state, or local laws governing disclosure of records.
- Protect confidential sources and witnesses.
- Protect the identity of victims of sex crimes, domestic violence, and juveniles.
- Protect the privacy, life, or safety of any person.
- Avoid undue trauma due to explicit or graphic content by accompanying videos with appropriate caveats and warning labels.

06

Stipulate any delays in the release of BWC footage and provide public notice if delay is due to:

- Compliance with a court order or restraining order preventing release of such footage.
- Compliance with federal, state, or local laws governing disclosure of records or existing department procedures.

ARE THERE OTHER LONGER-TERM INITIATIVES THE HPD SHOULD CONSIDER RELATED TO BWCs?

07

Make clear the discipline required for an officer not turning on his or her BWC.

IPOB members have confirmed that there are cases that lack BWC footage, making it difficult to determine what happened, especially if there are conflicting accounts between the civilian and the officer. The Task Force acknowledges that there are situations in which the officer might forget to turn on his or her BWC, but repeated forgetfulness should not be tolerated.

08

Upgrade the HPD's BWCs.

Forgetting to turn on or off a BWC can be avoided by using newer technology. Some BWCs offer real-time video streaming, while others offer Bluetooth trigger options for automatic recording. Agencies can select inputs that trigger BWCs to automatically turn on without manual activation. Triggers might include turning on a cruiser's lights or sirens, crash sensor activation when the car reaches a certain speed, or when nearby dashboard cameras or BWCs are switched on.³¹

09

Invest in dashboard cameras ("dashcams") for all police cars.

According to findings by the Center for Justice Research at Texas Southern University, only 12% of HPD patrol cars have dashcams. A study by the International Association of Chiefs of Police ("IACP") reported that, similar to BWCs, in-car video systems resulted in greater professionalism by police and fewer complaints against them by members of the public. Dashcams provide additional evidence for civilians and reduce police department liability by providing real-time video footage. Additional dashcams may lead to a decrease in the number of civilian complaints and reduce the costs associated with investigating complaints.³² More dashcams may also contribute to improved force performance and operating efficiency.³³

Body camera footage should be released immediately—that’s public paid surveillance, the public has the right to see it. I respect police that serve and protect with dignity for human rights, but police should not be allowed to police themselves.”

—TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

10

Prohibit the use of facial recognition software with BWC footage.

In 2016, a Georgetown Law report found that nearly half of US adults' photos (48%) had been entered into some type of facial recognition network.³⁴ These networks use facial recognition software to analyze high-resolution images. Specifically, they use biometrics from BWC footage (or other footage or photos) to map out people's facial features. Then, they compare that information with other images in a database to find matches. Leading civil rights organizations oppose the use of facial recognition technology because they fear it will turn BWCs into a pervasive surveillance tool that will disproportionately impact communities of color. The software, in fact, generates a higher rate of false matches for people of color, especially women of color.³⁵ Due to discriminatory policing practices, Black people tend to be arrested at disproportionate rates and thus are overrepresented in database systems that rely on mug shot databases. Because of the potential for misuse and false positives, departments should not use facial recognition software to scan video footage.

ARE THERE RESOURCES I CAN CHECK OUT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT BWCs AND VIDEO RELEASE POLICIES IN OTHER CITIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES?

Yes. Take a look at **Appendix C: "Additional work on body-worn cameras ("BWC")."**

B) Limiting use of force

As the [#8CantWait](#) campaign demonstrates, [research](#) shows that more restrictive use of force policies can help reduce police killings and save lives. The HPD and the City have already taken some steps to update and outline guidance on use of force that addresses these and other reforms.

Today, the HPD:

- Prohibits chokeholds ([EO 1-67](#))
- Requires de-escalation ([EO 1-67](#))
- Requires officers to exhaust all alternatives before shooting ([EO 1-67](#))
- Restricts when officers can shoot at moving vehicles ([EO 1-67](#))
- Requires a duty to intercede ([EO 1-67](#)) and a duty to render aid ([GO 600-18](#))
- Has a use of force continuum ([GO 600-17](#))
- Requires comprehensive reporting ([GO 600-17](#))
- Requires officers to give a verbal warning, when possible, before using deadly force ([EO 1-67](#))

While these measures represent positive steps in the right direction, the department should add the following:

1. **Ban “no knock warrants” for non-violent offenses.** The existing EO still allows for “no knock warrants” as long as “the warrant has been approved in writing by the HPD Chief of Police or his designee (“Chief of Police”) and the warrant has been signed by a district court judge.” Those circumstances in which non-violent offenses have occurred should not justify the use of a “no-knock warrant” that could endanger the lives of both officers and civilians.³⁶
2. **Update, consolidate, and make fully transparent HPD’s de-escalation and use of force policies.** Three documents are referenced above including one Executive Order and at least two General Orders. The department should consolidate all input on de-escalation and use of force such that the policies are clear, comprehensive, concise, and easily accessible for public inspection.

WHAT ADDITIONAL CHANGES DOES THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND REGARDING USE OF FORCE?

77

Place additional restrictions on when and how officers use force.

Far too often, deadly force is still used in situations where it is not truly needed. The killing of Nicolas Chavez at the hands of four HPD officers confirms this. Though officers initially spent fifteen minutes practicing de-escalation techniques, Mr. Chavez, who was suffering from an apparent mental break, was shot 21 times when he reached for a used Taser. By that point, he was sitting on the ground, having already been incapacitated by multiple Taser cartridges, bean bags, and three gunshots. Chief Acevedo confirmed that 28 officers were at the scene and that they had plenty of cover and distance when Mr. Chavez was reaching for the Taser.

To further reduce the unnecessary use of deadly force, Houston officials should adopt a version of the use of force standards as outlined by Dallas faith leaders, community organizers, and activists in their statement, [*10 New Directions for Public Safety and Positive Community Change*](#).

The City of Houston's current EO states, "The use of deadly force by means of a firearm is limited to those circumstances in which an officer has an objectively reasonable belief that the use of deadly force is necessary to protect the officer or others from imminent serious bodily injury or death."

Given the above, absent extraordinary circumstances, the Task Force does not believe that the following situations would justify the use of deadly force:

1. if a suspect is unarmed;
2. if a suspect is running away or attempting to withdraw;
3. if a suspect is driving away or sitting in a parked car;
4. if a suspect is not armed with a firearm—for example, when a suspect is holding a knife, screwdriver, or blunt object; and
5. if the officer is alone – for example, after a solo foot chase.

// Continued on next page

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In the event that deadly force is used, officers shall not shoot multiple times at a suspect without re-evaluating the necessity of additional deadly force.

One could argue that outlining the above scenarios is unnecessary because those instances should be logically covered by the “objectively reasonable” modifier in the EO. However, too many cases still exist in which an officer has used unnecessary deadly force under the guise of “imminent threat to serious bodily injury or death.” Given the all too numerous unjustified uses of deadly force, the rules and expectations regarding the use of deadly force must be reassessed before the community can explicitly trust officers with their lives.

12

Require officers to have at least 30 successfully completed hours in higher education, with a commitment to continue their education to at least 60 hours while serving in the department.

Studies show that while higher education carries “no influence over the probability of an arrest or search occurring in a police-suspect encounter,” a college education “does significantly reduce the likelihood of force occurring.”³⁷ The same study indicates that officers who have graduated from college are almost 40% less likely to use any form of force.

The Task Force acknowledges the potential for unintended consequences associated with imposing higher education requirements on incoming officers, including possibly negatively impacting minority or low-income applicants. However, the HPD already requires a college degree for promotion to the Commander level, offers financial incentives for earning a college degree, and reimburses officers who earn college credit or additional degrees (with appropriate stipulations). By continuing to encourage and support officers to reach desired education levels, the department can help reduce the overall likelihood of using force.

13

Invest in an “Early Warning System” that tracks officer performance with the goal of preemptively identifying high-risk officers.

Several police departments have created computerized databases that track civilian complaints, use-of-force incidents, firearm discharges, resisting arrest reports, vehicular accidents, absenteeism, and any other criteria that may be an indication of “behavior problems in the making.”³⁸ These systems help leadership with early intervention, through which they can proactively counsel, train, or mentor officers who may need extra attention.

14

In particularly high crime areas, police officer patrol units should include two uniformed officers.

Though dependent on staffing, a partner patrol policing approach offers more security to officers, which in turn make officers less likely to be aggressive or use force. Additionally, a second officer can aid in assessing a situation and help de-escalate. Based on the duty to intercede policy, multiple officers are more likely to hold one another accountable and prevent an officer from using force without cause.

Rebuilding trust through transparency

Transparency plays a pivotal role in keeping the HPD accountable and building community trust.

75

Redesign the HPD website to be more accessible and user-friendly.

The [current website](#) is difficult to navigate and appears outdated. Many of the reforms discussed here suggest publishing data to the public on a regular basis. A redesigned website will allow civilians to more easily access data, policies, and other important forms or information.

When redesigning the website, Houstonians' input should be solicited through focus groups and user testing. Additionally, the website should reflect current best practices (e.g., adaptive design), comply with Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA") guidelines, and be available in multiple languages.

76

Publish an annual report to share HPD's diversity initiatives, practices, and statistics in all areas of policing such as recruitment, hiring, training, and promotion.

The HPD states that it is a "majority-minority" department and should therefore have no problem publicizing their detailed demographic information on a regular basis. At worst, disclosure of the information may indicate a need for improvement. At best, it may demonstrate progress or encourage the Houston community to get involved in making improvements.

17

Publish disciplinary policies externally, and include an annual report recapping disciplinary action taken.

The HPD's disciplinary process should be transparent, not only to the internal department, but also to the broader public. The Houston community can gain confidence by seeing concrete, visible assurances that leadership applies consistent and appropriate discipline for officers' misconduct.

Human Rights Watch suggests: "Police departments should provide a report, respecting privacy concerns, describing at least the number of officers disciplined, the offenses leading to punishment, and the types of punishment, over a set time period. Such a report should also include the names and number of officers indicted or convicted during the reporting period, and the charges brought against them; this information should never be withheld."³⁹

18

Require performance-based audits of patrol and investigative functions, and publish the findings at regular intervals.

To create a checks-and-balances system and to maintain a culture of community-centered law enforcement, there needs to be an exhaustive, accessible, and frequently updated database of police encounters and audits. This pillar of transparency and accountability will continue to establish trust within the community, as well as legitimacy internally and externally for the department.

19

Maintain a public database of complaints against officers, sustained and unsustained.

Release, and make easily accessible, police officer disciplinary records to include all sustained matters and consequences, along with the total number of complaints (sustained and unsustained). Including unsustained complaints can be a difficult task; however, if an officer has 100 complaints raised against him or her, and a typical officer with the same years of experience only has an average of two, that could warrant further investigation.

20

Increase the level of detail on HPD's Annual Racial Profiling Reports.

HPD's [current racial profiling reports](#) cover the minimum amount of detail as established by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement ("TCOLE"). However, only the number of traffic stops, reason for the traffic stop, and reason for the search are broken down by race.

The Houston Chronicle reported that "many researchers have concluded the best way to test racial bias is to examine what occurs after a stop, when police have no doubt of a driver's race."⁴⁰ The HPD should include the results of the traffic stop broken down by race, including: whether drugs or other evidence of illegal activity were found; whether a citation was issued or an arrest made; and whether the stop resulted in use of force.

pe H

PD needs to seek maximum transparency (cameras, relevant policies) in its actions and demonstrate that the force respects the life of the citizens it protects.”

–TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

Promoting respectful, equitable policing

Many of the negative stories that we heard from our community survey respondents were about not being treated with respect by an HPD officer. Treating people with respect builds trust, encourages collaboration, and enhances relationships between the HPD and the community.

21

Execute a zero-tolerance policy for use of derogatory, demeaning, or dehumanizing language directed toward civilians.

Use of explicit language when addressing, referring to, or giving orders to civilians should not be tolerated, overlooked, or ignored, as it creates a toxic divide between officers and civilians, and is poisonous to police-community relations.

22

Adopt a 'customer service' approach to all aspects of policing with all civilians during traffic stops, complaint processes, and non-enforcement activities.

All civilians should be greeted and treated with respect. Officers should be reminded to clearly state their name, specific police station, and badge number (and/or hand out their business card), in addition to explaining what they are doing and why.

23

Ensure adoption of best practices for recruiting a diverse workforce, including but not limited to:

- Release information about recruitment events to various diverse stakeholders (e.g., local universities, particularly universities that have high enrollments of students of color, grassroots organizations, community centers, faith organizations, and houses of worship).
- Work with a recruitment team that reflects the diversity of the HPD's desired applicants, who are able to share their stories with potential recruits in a way that embraces diversity.
- Actively recruit citizens to join the HPD for the purpose of policing neighborhoods with which they have existing connections (i.e., from there, live there, or work there).
- Adopt and publish hiring criteria that reflect the desired qualities and values of officers (e.g., strong problem-solving and communication skills, bilingual language skills, a connection to the community).

Diversity amongst officers in a police agency and the interrelationships fostered by this diversity can help develop understanding, combat prejudices, and curb practices offensive to minority groups.⁴¹ Additionally, individuals who are high in traits like emotional stability, empathy, and openness are more likely to adapt to working with community members who different from them.⁴²

24

Adopt a bias-free policing policy.

In [General Order 100-6](#), the HPD states, “All persons should be treated fairly and equitably.” This short statement does not go nearly far enough in articulating HPD’s commitment to protecting and serving the Houston community in a unbiased manner. Departments across the country, including San Francisco, Orlando, New Orleans, and Fort Worth, among others, have adopted specific policies entitled “Bias-Free Policing.”

The HPD should create a policy that clearly states the commitment of the entire HPD (i.e., all sworn officers and civilian staff) to provide unbiased, high-quality service to every Houstonian. An excellent resource entitled “[Bias-Free Policing](#)” from the Law Enforcement Policy Center provides steps that local leaders can take to define, train, and implement this type of policy in their departments.

The HPD must define biased-free policing, and make it clear that the department does not consider specified or perceived personal characteristics (e.g., race, ethnic background, national origin, immigration status, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, age, ability, or political affiliation), except when credible intelligence links a person with those characteristics to “an accident, criminal pattern, or scheme.”

25

Adopt model policies relating to police interactions with youths, including:

- A general policy related to youth interactions
- A policy related to juvenile arrests, booking and custody procedures ([GO 500-06](#))
- A policy related to interviews and interrogation of youths
- A policy related to special populations of youths

Risk-taking is a natural part of youth development and identity formation. Most youth mature out of these tendencies. Youths differ from adults in three important ways that lead to differences in behavior.⁴³

- Youth have less capacity for self-regulation in emotionally charged contexts.
- Youth have a heightened sensitivity to external influences, such as peer pressure, immediate incentives, and adult coercion; this heightened sensitivity may negatively impact a youth's ability to make decisions.
- Youth show less ability than adults to make judgments and decisions that demonstrate an understanding of consequences.

Adopting specific youth policies will demonstrate the HPD's commitment to equip its officers with developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed strategies for equitable responses to youth. Strategies for Youth, a non-profit organization that has worked with police departments across the nation to improve relationships between police and young people, has developed [five model policies](#) that HPD should consider.

26

The Task Force supports Mayor Turner’s and HPD’s proposal to implement a cite-and-release program for citation-eligible offenses (announced on September 17, 2020).⁴⁴

The Task Force recommends including regular, transparent reporting to help monitor policy implementation, frequency of exceptions, and the reasons for those exceptions—including demographic information for individuals both cited and arrested.

As communities of color are disproportionately disadvantaged by arrests for offenses that are citation-eligible, the elimination of this unfair arrest policy is likely to decrease feelings of tension between those communities and law enforcement by reducing the fear associated with the possibility of unnecessary arrest.

“Talk to me with respect. Don’t treat me like I’m a criminal. Don’t use the N-word. Let me drive somewhere safe in the light to talk if you want to question me. Police officers need to be more understanding. Don’t assume we are doing something wrong because of our clothes or the color of our skin.”

—HOUSTON PEACE YOUTH SURVEY RESPONDENT

27

Improve fairness in Houston’s municipal courts by requiring alternatives to jail time for people who can’t afford to pay fines and fees.

Between June 2014 and March 2020, the HPD arrested more than 48,000 people for Class C Misdemeanor warrants, about 15% of the total arrests made during that period.⁴⁵ In 1983, a landmark Supreme Court case (*Bearden v. Georgia*) established that “punishing a person for his poverty” violates the equal protection clause of the Constitution; yet, the practice of arresting people for their failure to pay fines is still widespread. Studies have shown that an inability to afford the cost of court-imposed fines leads to the first arrest for many economically depressed people in the United States.⁴⁶

The [Justice Can’t Wait](#) report includes five excellent steps toward creating a more equitable policy, including:

- End the OmniBase Program, which prevents people from renewing their driver’s licenses until they pay outstanding municipal court fines (for more information on the OmniBase Program, check out Texas Appleseed’s [Driven By Debt](#) report).
- Impose fine amounts that are truly affordable.
- Waive fines and costs for people who cannot afford to pay them.
- Find alternative ways for people to resolve fines, such as a manageable number of community service hours.
- Ensure warrants are only issued for failure to appear after more than one attempt has been made to reach an individual.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A productive relationship between the HPD and the community requires a breakdown of power dynamics—increased transparency around policies and performance, and policing practices that both respect and protect the dignity of all Houstonians.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Task Force has taken the initiative to suggest time frames for the implementation of each reform detailed in this section. At a minimum, we would expect a status update on these recommendations within the given range.

SHORT TERM WITHIN 90 DAYS

—

- 01-06:** BWC release criteria
- 07:** Discipline for misuse of BWC
- 10:** Facial recognition software
- 11:** Use of force policies
- 14:** Two-officer patrols
- 21:** Derogatory language
- 22:** 'Customer service' approach
- 23:** Diverse workforce
- 24:** Bias-free policing policy
- 25:** Model policies for youths
- 26:** Cite-and-release reporting
- 27:** Jail time alternatives

Additional:

Ban no-knock warrants for non-violent offenses

MEDIUM TERM WITHIN 6-12 MONTHS

—

- 15:** HPD website
- 16:** Diversity annual report
- 17:** Disciplinary policies
- 18:** Performance audits
- 19:** Public complaint database
- 20:** Racial profiling reports

Additional:

Consolidate use of force policies

LONG TERM 1 YEAR+

—

- 08:** Upgrade BWCs
- 09:** Dashcams
- 12:** Educational requirement
- 13:** Early warning system

CRISIS INTERVENTION

Expand existing partnerships between the HPD, mental health professionals, and social services organizations to lighten the load on officers when responding to vulnerable populations, such as those experiencing mental health crises, domestic violence, human trafficking, substance abuse, and homelessness.

WHY IS CRISIS INTERVENTION IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT?

The City of Houston already has in place a strong model for crisis intervention. By expanding the City's and the HPD's existing partnerships, our police officers will be able to focus more on their role as guardians, while our civilians will receive more of the support they need from trained social services providers.

Our conversation on partnerships will center on the HPD's working relationship with partners in crisis intervention. Specifically, we focus on programs for crisis intervention, which support officers in navigating crisis calls that may involve mental health needs.

In this section, we will explore and evaluate Houston's existing partnerships and programs aimed at crisis intervention.

The Task Force will also share recommendations for expanding those partnerships to promote right-fit care for our community's most vulnerable populations.

WHAT IS CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING?

The primary goal of crisis intervention training (“CIT”) is to provide law enforcement officers with the tools to respond effectively to situations involving a person with mental illness in crisis and, when appropriate, refer them to mental health services rather than incarceration. The CIT model varies widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction based on local need, resources, and collaboration.

WHAT DOES THE CIT MODEL LOOK LIKE IN HOUSTON?

In 2019, the Mental Health Division of the HPD consisted of 40 full-time personnel. The HPD’s model includes training and response. The CIT Unit trains more than 5,600 law enforcement personnel annually.

In addition to CIT-trained officers, the HPD maintains twelve Crisis Intervention Response Teams (“CIRT”). Houston has one of the largest single police department co-responder programs in the nation, through which an officer and clinician ride together as partners. The CIRT program can be thought of as a specific subset—a unique strategy existing alongside CIT-trained officers. A CIRT team pairs a licensed, masters-level mental health clinician from The Harris Center with a law enforcement partner. The philosophy of the program is to 1) promptly and accurately assess and treat individuals experiencing a mental health crisis to avoid unnecessary incarceration, and to 2) utilize the

least restrictive means of stabilizing people, including linkage into outpatient services where indicated.

The mobile CIRT teams respond to 911 dispatch calls and referrals from the HPD Mental Health Division, the Harris County Sheriff’s Office Mental Health Unit, and The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD. The law enforcement officer researches the individual’s criminal history and provides safety by securing the scene. The licensed, masters-level clinician accesses medical records to research the individual’s mental health history en route to the crisis.

Once on the scene, the clinician will provide a mental health assessment, determine the appropriate level of care (e.g., is hospitalization indicated?), offer linkage/referral to services, and educate on-scene family members or other concerned parties. Clinicians also act as consultants to law enforcement and assist with obtaining inpatient hospital beds. Law enforcement may provide transportation to an inpatient facility for individuals in severe crisis. CIRT also completes follow-ups at the request of the referral source.

In October 2011, a joint Harris County Sheriff’s Office (“HCSO”) / HPD CIRT was formed that serves the entire Houston/Harris County region. The interlocal agreement was approved by both the Harris County Commissioner’s Court and the Houston City Council, and it allowed the HCSO to join with the HPD and The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD’s CIRT program.

HOW DOES HOUSTON'S MODEL COMPARE TO NATIONAL STANDARDS?

While there has not been enough research to date to declare CIT an “Evidence Based” practice, CIT has been called both a “Promising Practice” (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2010) and a “Best Practice” model for law enforcement.⁴⁷ One of the core elements of the model is collaboration with community partners, including mental health providers.⁴⁸

The US Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance supports ten urban and rural police departments to act as host sites to visiting law enforcement agencies and their mental health partners. The HPD is one of the technical assistance sites for crisis intervention training, thus serving as a leader in training other departments across the country.

The US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (“SAMHSA”) has identified standards for CIT.⁴⁹ When comparing the HPD’s CIRT model to the standard, CIRT operates with and above adherence to SAMHSA best practice standards (see **Appendix D:** “Comparison of the HPD’s CIRT model to national standards”).

HOW DO 911 CALLS REACH CIRT?

All calls come from the dispatcher via the Houston Emergency Center (“HEC”). 911 call-takers answer the phone lines when a civilian calls to report an emergency for police or fire response. The call takers follow a logic tree of questions based on the nature of the complaint. The call taker will generate a call slip summary

with a specific title accompanied by a four-digit numerical code that best matches the nature of the call (e.g., “3041 Disturbance/CIT”) and assign a response priority that ranges from Code One to Code Seven (Code One being the highest priority). The call slip will contain a brief narrative of the complaint with limited details of involved persons and a possible phone number.

Once the calls slips are created, they are sent to a queue on the dispatch board broken down by patrol district boundaries (i.e., geographic areas of the city divided into 22 patrol districts). The dispatcher will broadcast the call for service to the patrol officers via police radio and the next available unit will either volunteer or be dispatched to respond to the call for service.

CIRT does not adhere to any one specific district and beat. CIRT operates countywide and will be called upon by the request of any patrol unit or any district dispatcher. Both the CIRT officer and clinician can see the call slip details and run the consumer’s name (if provided by the reporter) in the clinical database for any potential documented history of public mental health treatment. Oftentimes, the clinician and officer will be able to know the history of their mental health prior to their arrival (time permitting).

The HEC receives approximately one million calls for service for the HPD annually. Within their line of questions, the 911 call-takers ask a series of basic questions related to mental health (i.e., does this involve someone with mental illness or someone in a mental health crisis?). If there is a link or component to mental health, the call-taker will label the call with one of the 28 types of CIT codes. Last year 40,500 calls were so labeled.

WERE ALL 40,500 CIT-CODED CALLS HANDLED BY CIRT?

No. CIRT Teams are dispatched as secondary (back-up) units to CIT calls. First line patrol units assigned to their respective districts and beats are dispatched as primary units to respond to CIT calls due to their closer proximity. The travel time for CIRT to respond to the call from dispatch time to arrival time can average twenty minutes depending on their current location throughout the entire city. CIT calls can be volatile, fluid, and unpredictable in required time per call. Any delay in responding could be detrimental to the safety of those involved at the scene as situations could deteriorate. If CIRT workers are tied up on calls, any other CIT-type calls will be sent to the dispatch board in queue awaiting a unit to be dispatched.

WERE ALL 40,500 CIT-CODED CALLS AT LEAST HANDLED BY CIT-TRAINED OFFICERS?

No. Last year, 72% of the HPD CIT calls were dispatched to CIT-trained officers. All new HPD officers receive Crisis Intervention Training, including training in mental health and de-escalation techniques, at the Police Academy. Gradually, the proportion of CIT-trained officers will continue to increase as new officers come onto the force.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF CIRT RESPONSES?

The primary goal of the CIRT program is to resolve mental health related calls to law enforcement which have no apparent criminal nexus and some potential risk of violence by responding to the mental health needs of the individual in crisis.

The dramatic success of this approach is illustrated in the table below. Dispositions of 25,227 calls recorded since 2014 are presented in Figure 2. The program's success in diverting individuals in mental health crisis away from the criminal justice system is evident in the rate (4.1%) of calls leading to incarcerations. Fewer than one in twenty individuals are transported to jail.

Successful crisis resolution is reflected in the proportion of calls resolved on the scene. About one in four crises (24.9%) are brought to immediate resolution with intervention by CIRT team staff. About 70% of calls are resolved by transport to crisis or emergency services. The Harris Center's 24/7 Psychiatric Emergency Service ("PES") located at the Neuropsychiatric Center ("NPC") in the Texas Medical Center receives more than one third of clients (34.4%) encountered by CIRT.

A slightly larger number (36.4%) have been transported to 38 area hospital emergency departments when the NPC/PES was at capacity and could no longer accept psychiatric crisis cases (see Figure 3). Of the calls resulting in hospital admission, most are involuntary (94%) and require Emergency Detention Orders ("EDO").

Fig 2. Dispositions of 25,227 diversion calls (since 2014)

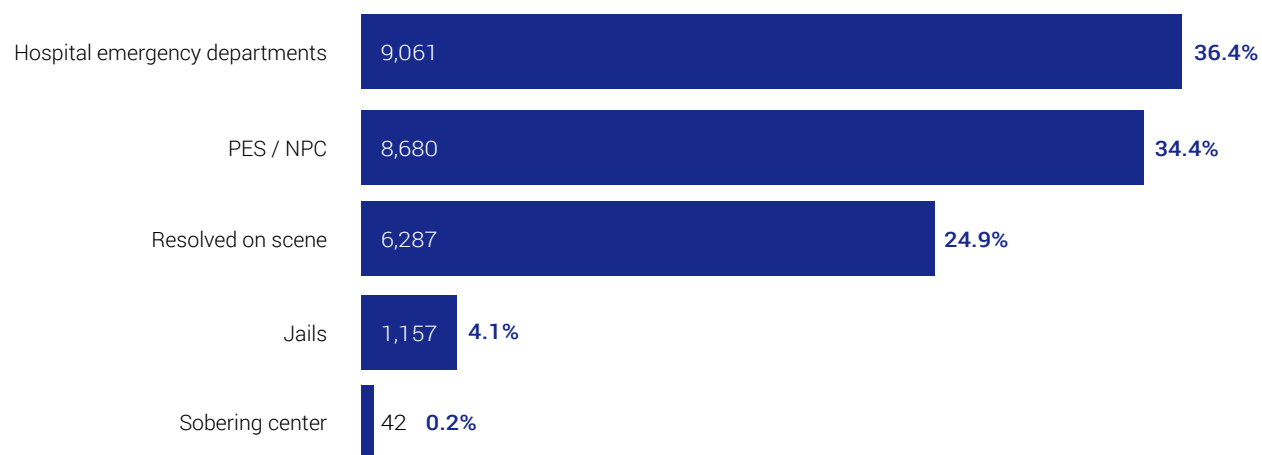
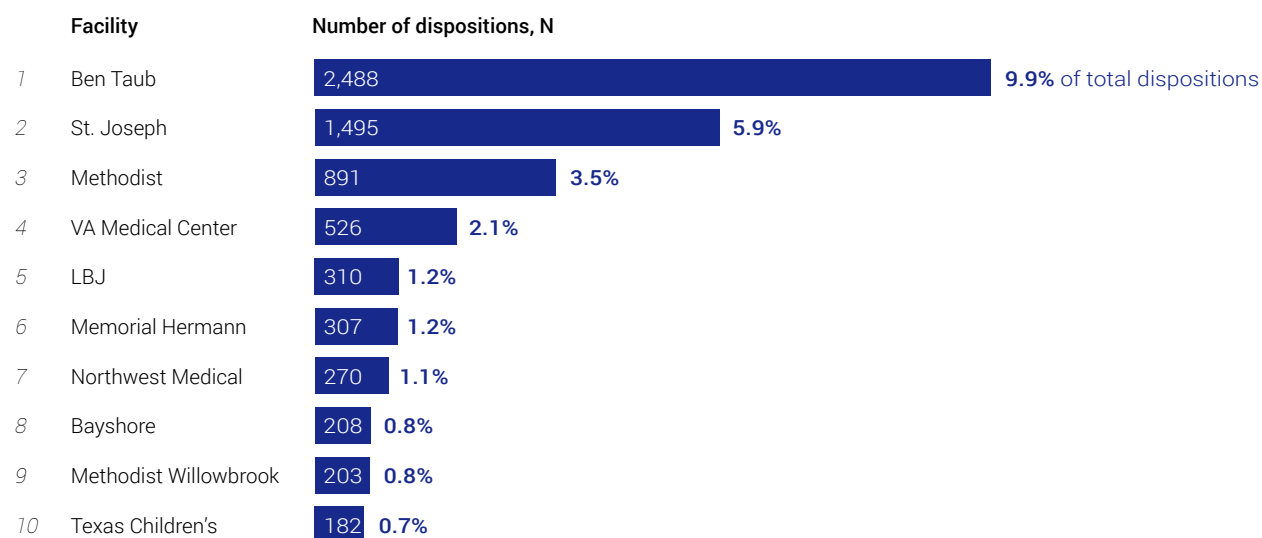


Fig 3. Ten most frequent hospital destinations from diversion calls

The hospitals included below represent 6,880 (27.2%) of the 25,227 total diversion calls. Percentages listed represent the percent of total dispositions for each destination hospital.



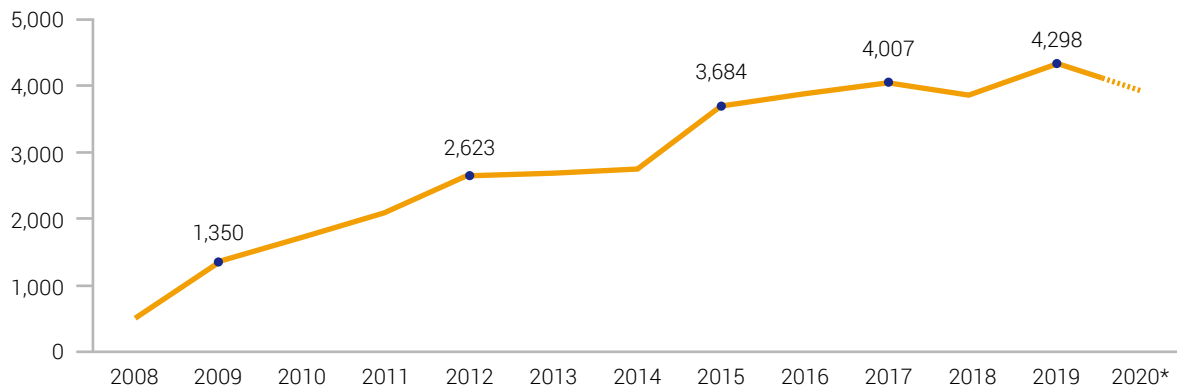
HOW MANY CIVILIANS ARE SERVED BY CIRT?

Since its inception in May 2008, CIRT has completed 35,708 calls to 21,083 unique individuals. These numbers only include events in which face-to-face connection with the caller was completed, which represent 75% of total calls referred to CIRT.

The program has increased its capacity in virtually every year since 2008. The growth of the program's productivity is presented in the graph below. Numbers for the current year (2020) have been annualized (extrapolated from year-to-date). Most frequently (72.6%), individuals served by the program are encountered only once. The range, however, extends to 34 encounters.

Fig 4. Total CIRT calls per year, 2008-2020*

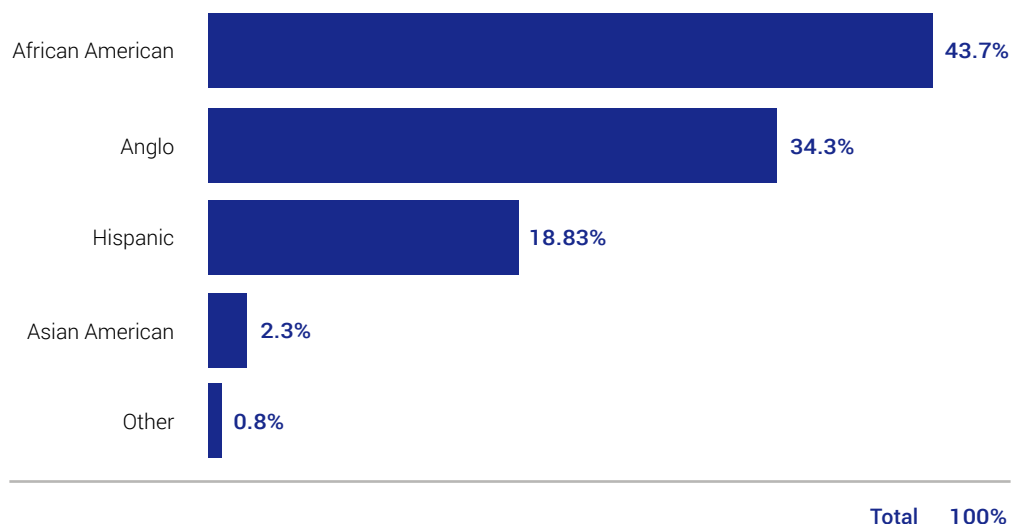
*Numbers for the current year (2020) have been annualized based on year-to-date data.



WHO DOES CIRT TYPICALLY SERVE?

The clients served were predominantly male (58.5%) vs. female (41.3%). The average age of participants was 36.4 years. Ninety percent were adults and ten percent were youth under 18 years old. The vast majority (94.8%) spoke English as their primary language. The major ethnic group categories were represented as follows: 43.7% African American, 34.3% Anglo, 18.83% Hispanic, 2.3% Asian American, and 0.8% "Other."

Fig 5. CIRT clients, by major ethnicity, April 2014 to August 2020



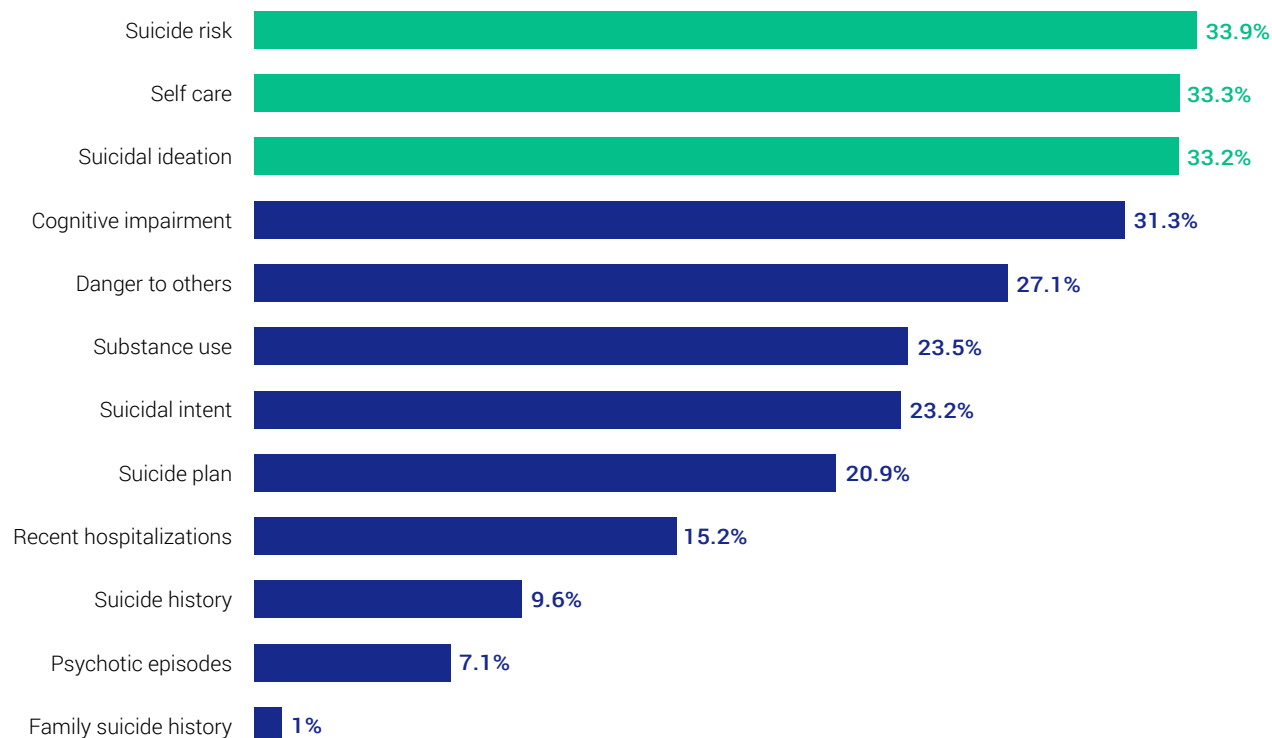
The modal (most frequently observed) participant had never married (62.8%), had completed 12 grades of education (22.2%), lived in their family home (62.8%), although 12.2% reported homelessness, and viewed themselves as outside the labor force (33.2%). Most (89.9%) reported incomes below the Federal Poverty Level. The mean annual income was \$6,228. Almost half (43.5%) were medically uninsured. A slightly larger number (46.5%) had federally funded health insurance (Medicaid, Medicare or CHIPS).

WHAT WERE THE COMMON DIAGNOSES?

The majority of diagnoses reflected serious mental illnesses, including Bipolar Disorders (29.8%), Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders (27.3%), and Major Depressive Disorders (17.0%). The remaining 24.3% suffered other disorders. Notably, 34.6% of participants were diagnosed with secondary substance use disorders.

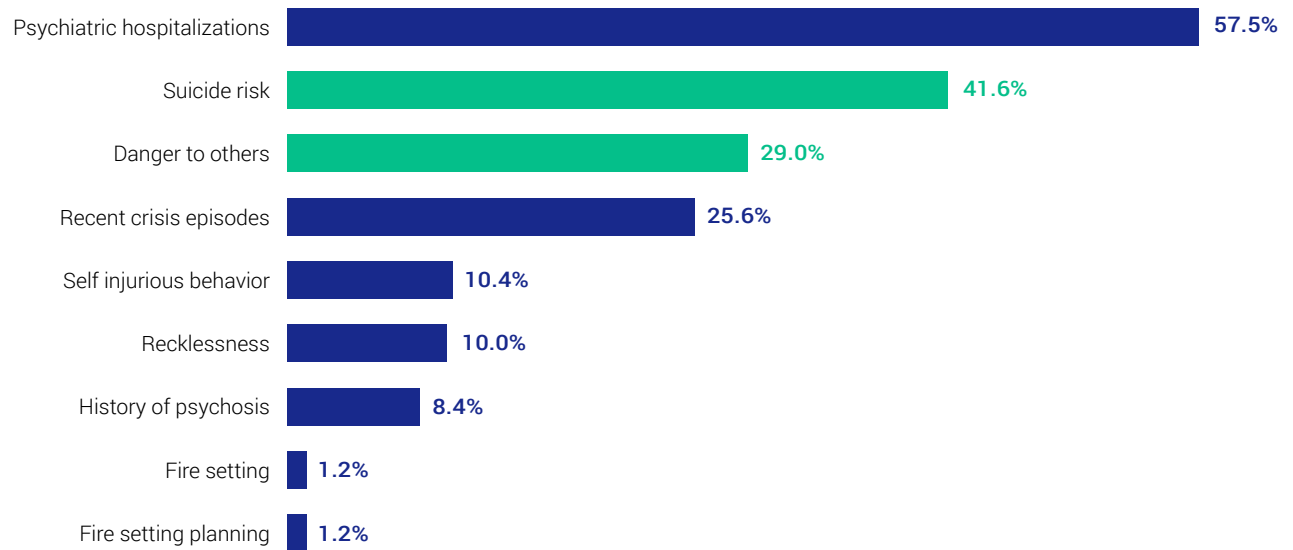
Individuals served by CIRT are assessed using a standardized instrument widely adopted for mental health treatment planning and outcome evaluation, the Adult Needs and Strengths Assessment (“ANSA”). The brief crisis version is best suited to CIRT use. The graph below shows the percentage of the 22,336 assessments in which specific problem areas were rated as severe. One can observe that suicidality is the most prominent problem area, accounting for the three peak elevations. Danger to others and substance abuse issues are also frequent severe problem areas.

Fig 6. Percent of 22,336 ANSA-evaluated adults who received a “severe” rating



Similar results for 2,288 children and adolescents served by CIRT are presented below. Youth served by the program had often been treated in psychiatric hospital and emergency services prior to the encounter. Suicide risk and danger to others were the most frequent problem areas.

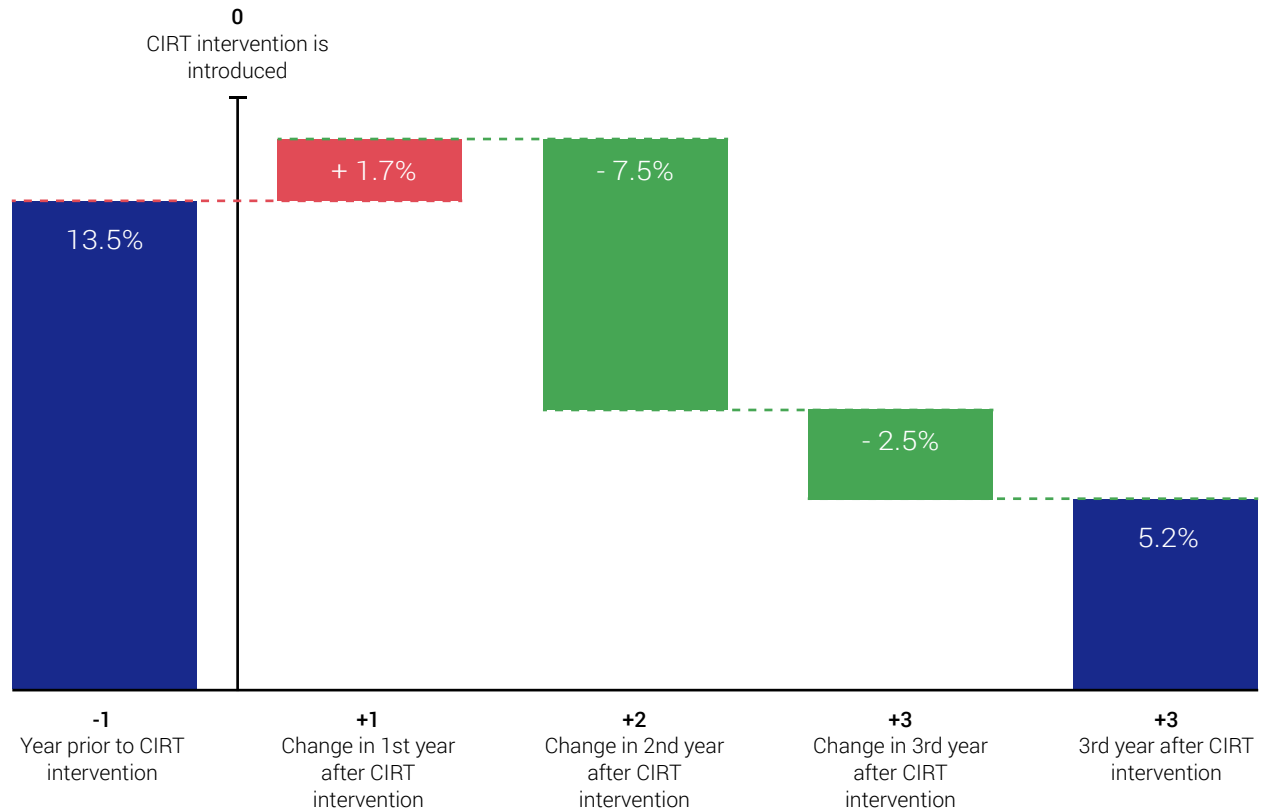
Fig 7. Percent of CANS-tested children who received a “severe” rating



WHAT IMPACT DID CIRT HAVE ON THE USE OF THE HARRIS COUNTY PSYCHIATRIC CENTER (“HCPC”)?

We evaluated data to determine if CIRT intervention had a longer-term impact on use of the county’s public psychiatric hospital, HCPC. As has been observed in evaluation of intensive case management services, reductions in hospital admissions may take more than one year to accrue. It is as though the individual requires a year of intensive services before sustained improvement occurs. One can observe that the annual rate of admission increases by 1.7% in the first year of CIRT intervention, followed by sharp reductions occurring in Year 2 and Year 3. Lacking a comparison group, one can conclude that these reductions may be due to intervention, but may also represent regression to the mean or the natural course of crises in a client’s lifetime. While longer-term benefits such as reduced use of public psychiatric hospitals are not the primary goal of this crisis program, it appears that these benefits may occur over a two- or three-year span.

Fig 8. Impact of CIRT intervention on admittance to the public psychiatric hospital



WHAT IMPACT DOES CIRT HAVE ON SUBSEQUENT CIT CALLS?

The question of whether CIRT intervention is associated with reductions in subsequent CIT calls can be answered in two ways. First, we observed that CIT calls actually increase from 0.13 calls per person during the year prior to the first CIRT call to 0.38 calls. This is a statistically significant increase. However, when CIRT clients are followed to the present date (average = 5.54 years since intervention), we observe significant decreases in annualized rates. The decrease from 0.88 annualized CIT calls per person to .08 annualized calls per person is noteworthy. One is reassured that a statistical test of the change is significant ($P < 0.001$) though the effect size is small (partial eta squared = 0.004). One can conclude that there is a decrease in CIT calls following CIRT intervention, but that the decrease occurs over more than a one-year span.

ARE THERE OTHER PROGRAMS WITHIN THE HPD'S MENTAL HEALTH DIVISION THAT SERVE PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

Yes. Look at **Appendix E**: "Other law enforcement collaborations with the HPD Mental Health Division" for a full list. One noteworthy program is Crisis Call Diversion ("CCD"), a partnership between the City of Houston, the HPD, The Harris Center, and the Houston Fire Department. Mental health professionals are embedded at the 911 call

center for the City of Houston. If the 911 call is labeled with one of the 28 types of CIT call codes, then a mental health professional will take the call.

Originally, only calls without a criminal nexus and without threats of violence could be directly sent to the CCD terminal for their handling. Since February 2020, some calls which are clearly mental health-related and also have a low-level criminal component may also be referred.

A successful diversion involves CCD resolving the situation over the phone with the concerned party, without needing a police or fire response. Some common responses to these calls include transfers to The Harris Center's crisis line, non-law enforcement mobile crisis response, community referrals, and development of suicide reduction "safety plans."

CCD may find during the course of the phone conversation that police intervention is still needed. The need may be due to the request of the caller or crisis escalation, necessitating an emergency response. The CCD counselor will send a message to the dispatcher advising them this call needs to be routed to police for their handling. After consultation with the caller and an intervention or referral to mental health services, CCD calls are returned to the Emergency Call Center queue so that law enforcement representatives can determine if further intervention is required.

HOW MANY 911 CALLS DOES CCD RESOLVE?

In fiscal year 2019, CCD successfully resolved 2,300 calls which, as a result, no longer required intervention from law enforcement.

The HPD reported that CCD-screened calls use less officer time than other CIT calls. Officers responding to CIT calls generally logged 123 minutes per call. In contrast, CCD-screened calls require only 36 minutes of officer time. Their data indicated that, on average, each CCD call saved 87 minutes.

WHAT ARE THE TASK FORCE'S CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE HPD'S CIRT AND CCD PROGRAMS?

The use of CIRT Teams is effective in meeting the primary goal of diverting mental health crises from jails and from unnecessary use of law enforcement personnel. The data reported above support the conclusions that:

1. CIRT operates with and above adherence to SAMHSA best practice standards.
2. Call triage effectively sorts requests into CIT codes and dispatches personnel appropriately to CIT-coded events. Calls diverted to CIRT do indeed have a mental health basis.

3. The high rate of CIRT diversion from jails (95.9%) indicates that the primary program goal is attained on a regular basis. Individuals, typically those with serious mental illness, are diverted from jails, reducing the criminalization of mental illness.
4. The ability to resolve calls on scene (24.9%) reflects the value added by trained, experienced mental health professionals who have demonstrated competence in de-escalation strategies.
5. Linkages to crisis services and emergency departments connect people in crisis with services intended to reduce danger to self and others.
6. CCD services dramatically reduce officer time for CIT calls.
7. Diversions initiate or enhance engagement with the mental health system which may produce longer-term benefits for both the individual and the public.

“ I wish there was a more publicized crisis response intervention team [to] direct people towards treatment... without involving the criminal justice system.

The key here is not just to have these teams, but also to ensure that the public knows about them.”

—TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

DOES THE TASK FORCE HAVE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT?

01

Expand the CCD program by: extending coverage by mental health counselors to 24/7, increasing the number of counselors in the program to handle more calls, and expanding the type of calls that the mental health counselors can answer, as appropriate.

Diversion of mental-health-related 911 calls at the call center level is the earliest point of diversion before any law enforcement involvement. Since the beginning of the program, CCD diverted more than 4,902 calls from law enforcement response and saved the equivalent of 7,353 hours of police time (March 2016 - May 2019). However, The Harris Center's current coverage of these mental health-related 911 calls is not 24/7.

The estimated cost for additional staff to provide 24/7 coverage and take on additional calls is \$272,140. The recommendation is consistent with The National Guidelines for Crisis Care essential elements within a no wrong-door integrated crisis system, which includes a 24/7 clinically staffed hub/crisis call center that provides crisis intervention capabilities.⁵⁰

02

Increase the number of Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams by eighteen teams and re-brand the model to receive referrals directly from 911 call takers in HEC via police band radios.

A Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (“MCOT”) is a team of mental health professionals that responds to situations involving a person in mental health crisis without the involvement of law enforcement. MCOT has a proven track record of handling situations involving mental health crises with appropriate community resources. Law enforcement is rarely needed. MCOT handles around 200 calls per month and can be dispatched from the CCD or The Harris Center’s crisis line. Additional staff could handle increased demand associated with the 40,000+ 911 mental health calls currently received. The estimated cost of this recommendation is \$4.3 million and would include eighteen new MCOT teams.

This recommendation is consistent with the National Guidelines for Crisis Care, which establishes essential elements within a no wrong-door integrated crisis system including mobile crisis teams available to reach any person in the service area in his or her home, workplace, or any other community-based location of the individual in crisis in a timely manner.⁵¹

03

Increase the number of CIRT teams by 24 new teams.

The role of local law enforcement in situations involving emergent public safety risk is essential. The collaboration and partnership between a law enforcement officer and a mental health clinician improves both public safety and mental health outcomes and is considered a core principle in best practice crisis care.⁵² The HPD currently has 12 CIRT teams. Between May 2019 and May 2020, HPD CIRT responded to more than 4,600 calls. An increased number of CIRT teams could respond to more mental health-related calls. The estimated cost of this recommendation is \$8.7 million for 24 new CIRT teams, including staff, vehicles, and equipment.

04

Implement the Clinician-Officer Remote Evaluation (“CORE”) program to provide telehealth technology to 80 HPD CIT-trained officers in patrol.

The Clinician-Officer Remote Evaluation Program (“CORE”) is a telehealth strategy for responding to mental health crisis calls using a tablet and a HIPAA-approved technology platform to connect a law enforcement first responder with a mental health clinician in the community at the time of the 911 dispatch. CORE provides an additional resource to law enforcement to handle calls involving a person with mental illness. The officers would have the capacity to access licensed clinicians at The Harris Center to assist with a mental health assessment on the scene via electronic technology. CORE also maximizes the mental health workforce. The Harris County Sheriff’s Office has already implemented the CORE program. The estimated cost of providing CORE services to 80 HPD officers is \$847,875, which includes technology and clinical staff.

The University of Houston has evaluated the Harris County Sheriff’s Office’s pilot of CORE, leading Harris County to expand the pilot into a permanent program.

05

Amend the Texas state law (Chapter 573 of Texas Health and Safety Code) related to Emergency Detention Orders to allow a physician and/or other health care professionals to execute a Notification of Detention, reducing law enforcement’s involvement.

The Legislature simplified the Notification of Detention paperwork (Texas Health and Safety Code Section 573.002) related to Emergency Detention Orders (“EDO”) for law enforcement. Only a law enforcement officer can authorize a Notification of Detention. The HPD executed 12,000 Notifications of Detention related to EDOs in 2019.

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Authorizing a physician and/or other health care professionals to execute Notifications of Detention would reduce law enforcement's role in this process involving persons in mental health crises. The Legislature must pass a new law to make this change. Political hurdles exist, as similar legislation has been introduced and did not pass. If the Legislature passes a bill to make this change, implementation could begin at the bill's effective date, which would likely be September 1, 2021.

Though the previous recommendations focus on aiding civilians with mental health services needs, the Task Force recommends two additional initiatives to help support other vulnerable populations: victims of domestic violence and victims of human trafficking and/or sexual exploitation.

06

Permanently fund a citywide Domestic Abuse Response Team ("DART") model that pairs police officers with a victim advocate and a forensic nurse examiner.

DART is a mobile intervention model for high-risk domestic violence victims that ensures victim safety, facilitates enhanced offender accountability, and builds victim trust in the criminal justice system. Domestic abuse scenes can often be violent and unpredictable. The partnership is a multi-disciplinary approach that attends to victim safety and allows for on-site evidence collection. The HPD officer handles safety and security so that the advocate and nurse can safely interact with and aid the victim. Partnerships with local community-based domestic violence agencies ensure that high-risk victims immediately connect to resources that ultimately save lives by providing emergency shelter and long-term care options for victims.

DART began as pilot program in January 2019. They currently operate three nights a week for eight hours (7pm – 3am) on the weekends in Northeast, North Belt, and North Patrol. Investment in a citywide effort could expand the hours that DART operates to serve more Houstonians in need.

“I work as a forensic nurse examiner specializing in sexual assault... I believe that police officers may not always be what survivors need. Patrol cops responding to calls of this nature are missing the mark on what sexual assault survivors need when they call for help.”

—TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

07

Decriminalize people in prostitution while continuing to prosecute pimps, brothel and illicit massage parlor owners and managers, sex tourism operators, and sex buyers.

The arrest of those who sell sex does not effectively address the violent and discriminatory system in which sex workers often find themselves. The disproportionate focus on arresting those selling sex—often women who are low-income, many of whom are coerced—rather than buyers, pimps, or brothel owners is deeply troubling. A trauma-informed, victim-centered approach is needed. Similar to the DART or CIRT programs, this program would include a pre-diversion program or drop-off center in partnership with community-based organizations so that law enforcement can focus on arresting the traffickers and buyers, not the sex workers or those that are being trafficked. Law enforcement is arresting the wrong people for these actions, and we suspect it is disproportionately impacting women of color.

Victims of sexual violence rarely get justice because the focus tends to be on their credibility rather than on the actions of the offender. In cases of trafficking, this dynamic is compounded by having the human trafficking department located in the Vice Division rather than in a victim services or a sex crimes unit. Finally, training for officers on human trafficking, sex trafficking, and the dynamics of sexual assault need to be examined and potentially expanded.

KEY TAKEAWAY

By expanding partnerships with mental health and social services providers, the HPD can not only better serve its officers by refocusing their day-to-day, but also better serve its community by offering right-size care for all.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Task Force has taken the initiative to suggest time frames for the implementation of each reform detailed in this section. At a minimum, we would expect a status update on these recommendations within the given range.

SHORT TERM
WITHIN 90 DAYS

—
01: CCD expansion

MEDIUM TERM
WITHIN 6-12 MONTHS

—
02: MCOT expansion
04: CORE program
05: Texas EDO law amendment
06: DART funding

LONG TERM
1 YEAR+

—
03: CIRT team expansion
07: Decriminalization

— FIELD READINESS

Equip and prepare officers for better engagement in the field through initiatives like reviewing and updating officer training, expanding mental health and wellness programs for officers, and instituting a mentorship program.

WHAT DETERMINES FIELD READINESS?

Cadet training is integral to preparing officers for their time in the field. However, initial training at the Academy is only one tool that the HPD provides to its officers. Recurring training, support for officers' mental health and wellbeing, and commitment from leadership to listen and adjust to officers' needs are critical, too.

In this section, we will discuss:

- A. The effectiveness of **officer training** within and beyond the classroom
- B. The importance of **officer health and wellness** in promoting more sustainable readiness
- C. The need for **additional support initiatives** to streamline in-field operations

A) Promoting effective officer training

Views on officer training tend to fluctuate based on current circumstances; for example, when things go well, the public tends to be satisfied with officer training, but when things go poorly, the public tends to point to a lack of training as a significant problem. To ensure officer field readiness at all times, the HPD should approach training with the mindset of continuous improvement, adapting to the changing needs of officers, the public, and ongoing best practices.

WHAT TRAINING DO INCOMING CADETS RECEIVE?

Prospective cadets enter the HPD's Training Academy and receive six months of academic and physical training. Each class begins with approximately 75 cadets. Cadets receive 696 hours of Texas Commission on Law Enforcement ("TCOLE") [Mandated Instruction](#) (including 40 hours of Crisis Intervention Training ("CIT")). The HPD expands on this minimum level of training by providing 972.5 hours of Basic Police Officer Class ("BPOC") content, 104 hours of additional HPD instruction, and 28.5 Testing Hours, totaling 1,105 hours of additional instruction during the six-month training program. Additionally, the HPD administers approximately 87 hours of classroom instruction on defensive tactics training, which does not include their one-hour physical fitness sessions three days a week, totaling around 72 hours.

The cadets are tested on and required to pass nine academic primaries, four quizzes, a grammar quiz, and a Spanish test. Additionally, they are graded on their firearms and driving performance.

WHO ADMINISTERS THE TRAINING?

There are approximately 374 trainers eligible to teach classes for the HPD. Trainers either initiate a lesson plan or they are requested to teach a course by the department. The majority of the trainers are employed with the department, though there are additional trainers employed with other agencies and/or companies (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, Anti-Defamation League). As mentioned above, all incoming cadets receive 40 hours of CIT instruction, which is taught by HPD Mental Health Division officers. Other courses taught by mental health professionals include: Psychology of Policing One & Two, Situational Awareness, Beyond Trauma, and Traumatic Brain Injury.

All instructors have either completed the TCOLE 40 Hours Basic Instructor Course and/or have training experience. Trainers are normally selected because of their expertise in the subject matter.

DO EXISTING OFFICERS RECEIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING ON AN ANNUAL BASIS?

Yes. HPD classified personnel are required to take 32 total hours each HPD Training Cycle (September 1 through August 31). Classes are offered primarily in person. Where appropriate, scenario-based training (“SBT”) exercises are incorporated. In addition, officers have been required to take other mandatory classes and a number of electives so that they fulfill their yearly training requirement. CIT-trained officers receive an additional eight hours of “Advanced CIT” training per year.

Approximately 92% of HPD officers exceeded the required 32 hours of training during the last training cycle.

DO OFFICERS NEED MORE TRAINING?

Training is not the final answer for solving problems and cannot be said to be the perfect (or even sometimes the best) answer for addressing problems. For example, the Minneapolis Police Department implemented progressive police reform interventions, including offering implicit bias training, mindfulness, de-escalation techniques, and training for mental health crisis intervention. Despite these interventions, George Floyd was killed. Additionally, it can be difficult to find research or data that supports training effectiveness in certain areas, as many factors beyond training can impact an officer’s in-field performance.⁵³

That said, many people—officers included—support opportunities for additional training. When officers are in the field, they rely on a mixture of instinct, training and experience, and we certainly want to ensure training impacts their decisions and behavior as much as possible. While we recognize the need for balance between time spent in training and time spent in the field, there are steps the HPD can take to re-evaluate and improve existing training to better serve the Houston community.

WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DOES THE TASK FORCE HAVE FOR HPD TRAINING?

01

Increase the amount and type of de-escalation training in the Academy, and include retraining at regular intervals.

Current cadet training includes eight hours of de-escalation training as required by TCOLE. While additional components of de-escalation may naturally arise through other training modules, we recommend expanding de-escalation training by examining updated best practices and including more opportunities for skill development such as mediation, problem-solving, communication, and other relevant content areas (e.g., sociology and conflict resolution). Training that encourages slower decision-making, greater transparency, and more communication can help reduce the misuse of force.⁵⁴

We recommend scenario-based training (“SBT”) that will allow officers to demonstrate their ability to communicate, listen, and de-escalate in realistic situations. Consideration should be given to how students are evaluated and, if needed for an individual, further training should be provided. A key component for the success of this training depends on proper vetting during the hiring process of officers, as well as the selection of instructors.

While there is room for additional research on the effectiveness of various training methods,⁵⁵ de-escalation training has been shown to affect civilian attitudes and perceptions of law enforcement, which is meaningful, even as some suggest a lack of evidence of the training’s impact on behavior.

To further promote positive change, we recommend validating that the HPD’s use of force and de-escalation policies are aligned with the training lesson plans. In addition, it is critical to ensure that updated lesson plans are followed by all instructors. The success of these changes could be measured by fewer violent or physical confrontations and a more positive attitude toward and perception of the police.

02

Review and update the department’s implicit bias and racial equity trainings, and include retraining at regular intervals.

The HPD offers four classes on “Multiculturalism and Human Relations” for incoming cadets, including Multiculturalism / Diversity Neighborhood Tour (eight hours), Multiculturalism / Human Relations Classroom (two hours), Multiculturalism Panel Discussion (four hours) and Situational Bias (one and a half hours). Additionally, cadets receive four hours of Racial Profiling, as mandated by TCOLE.

This training is arguably a step in the right direction but has a couple of major drawbacks. First, a neighborhood tour and a panel discussion cannot be considered in-depth enough to generate true cultural understanding and community connectedness (see Recommendation 01 in the “Community Policing” section). Additionally, this training module only includes one and a half hours of situational bias training, which is not enough time to effectively allow officers to understand, confront, and manage their own implicit biases.

New programming should be built out and expanded and everyone—all recruits, sworn officers, and civilian employees—should participate. In addition to expanding the implicit bias training (led by implicit bias trainers who specialize in working with law enforcement), this program must promote racial equity and literacy and have an anti-racist orientation. Training should allow for skill development over longer durations, rather than a one-off training session.

Any new training approaches that are deemed useful starting points should be tested and documented by the HPD. Having better data that shows proven results in reducing bias within the HPD will help to ensure that only evidence-based practices are continued. The Task Force acknowledges that assessing the efficacy of implicit bias and racial equity training is a difficult and persistent problem for any organization, not just police departments. Possible metrics the HPD could consider include racial profiling data, prejudice complaint statistics, and sustained incidences of prejudice statistics.

03

Review and update the HPD's current module on Taser Training.

With the number of recent events in which officers were disarmed of their Tasers ("CED devices"), it is important for the department to review its current policy concerning CEDs. A review of the use of the drive-stun application should take place to ensure officers completely understand the difficult task of using this application while attempting to secure a resisting person, especially if the officer is attempting to do so alone. Even if this application might be effective with another officer assisting, it still puts this weapon in a vulnerable position and could be taken away.

While we are not suggesting discontinuing the use of CEDs, we do understand that even when darts are deployed, there is no guarantee that the results will be effective. Therefore, officers should be trained to evaluate options that reflect the de-escalation policy of the department. This would include, but not be limited to, creating distance, continuing communication, executing cover/concealment, or holstering/securing the Taser. This training should be scenario-based to allow the officer to make decisions under as realistic conditions as possible.

04

Add additional education and training on interacting with persons with disabilities, including practical application by which people with disabilities and/or professionals who work with those with disabilities play a central role in the training.

When we spoke with Houston community members with disabilities, they shared with us that they felt that some officers had a lack of understanding when interacting with persons with disabilities in the field. From the HPD Academy Training List, it appears officers receive four hours of training on “Interacting with Deaf and Hard of Hearing.” However, deaf and hard of hearing is only one of many disabilities that are prevalent in the City of Houston.

According to Houston State of Health, 9.3% of people in Harris County have a disability.⁵⁶ Beyond a hearing difficulty, this percentage includes:

- **Mental difficulty:** By far the most common and most nebulous category. Examples include autism, traumatic brain injury, Down syndrome, or dementia, among many others.
- **Vision difficulty:** Someone who is blind or who has serious difficulty seeing even when wearing eyeglasses.
- **Self-care difficulty:** Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, the person has difficulty dressing, bathing, or getting around.
- **Ambulatory difficulty:** Someone who has serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.

People with disabilities are more likely to experience victimization, be arrested, be charged with a crime, and serve longer prison sentences once convicted, than those without disabilities.⁵⁷ To address this, the Task Force recommends adding additional training in disability awareness, understanding, and interaction. While officers may receive some overlapping training during the CIT courses, specific training for those with disabilities might include recognizing different disabilities, effective listening, recognizing non-verbal cues, practicing stress management and alternate means of communication, applying patience, and earning a person’s cooperation—all skills that might be applied differently when interacting with people with disabilities.⁵⁸

05

Integrate more Scenario-Based Training into existing training modules to simulate real-world conditions.

The Fiscal Year 2021 HPD budget outlines five short term goals, including “Increase the use of Scenario-Based Training (“SBT”).” SBT allows officers to participate in training that simulates, as much as possible, the actual conditions they will encounter in the field. Research recommends that “role-play scenarios are ideal—indoors and outdoors, as well as at night with dim or variable lighting, after running several blocks, with multiple opponents to think about, with other officers and bystanders on the scene, and while wearing on-duty clothing.”⁵⁹

The Task Force supports this goal and asks the HPD to prioritize this effort and add more specific metrics (e.g., How many training modules use SBT? How many more modules need SBT? How effective are modules with SBT versus without?). We recommend that these SBT modules are also evaluated to ensure they do not inherently promote implicit bias and discrimination through images, language, or actors being used.

06

Review and update the training module entitled “History of Policing” to include a unit about the enduring history between the Black community and the police.

By recognizing and studying the long history of racism in policing and the criminal justice system,⁶⁰ cadets can better understand the tensions and feelings of distrust and unease that exist between the Black community and law enforcement. Understanding breeds empathy, and this type of course will aid HPD officers during encounters with Black Houstonians.

07

Provide additional training opportunities and resources for Sergeants and Lieutenants.

Sergeants and Lieutenants are critical first-line supervisors who ensure that the vision and goals of the HPD are put into effect at the street level. They are responsible for managing the patrol officers who are seen as the “face of the department” by most community members. The Task Force recommends a review of existing Sergeant- and Lieutenant-level training modules to determine effectiveness. Updates should be made to the HPD’s current offering by reviewing best practices and soliciting input from all HPD officers (i.e., those managed by front-line supervisors, front-line supervisors themselves, and those who manage front-line supervisors).

08

Audit and evaluate officer training on an annual basis to update modules based on officer feedback, academic experts, community input, and changing best practices.

Police training—just like police policies and practices—must be viewed as dynamic and changing. As public safety issues become increasingly complex, communities become increasingly diverse, and police departments discover new and more effective techniques, police training programs must be updated to accommodate these changes. The goal of continuing to evaluate and revise the HPD’s training program is to employ the most efficient, effective, and evidence-based training process that still maintains the integrity of the methods.⁶¹

09

Audit and evaluate training instructors on an annual basis to ensure trainers are upholding the desired values of the HPD and continue to reflect the diversity of the department and the City.

Serving as a trainer is a privilege, not a right. Not only should trainers be evaluated by trainees and leadership, but also they should be assessed to ensure that they represent, support, and encompass competencies around the full spectrum of diverse communities in Houston and the HPD.

10

Evaluate, screen, and train field trainers to ensure they are upholding and encouraging policing best practices.

Peter Drucker originated the phrase, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” It is fundamentally police culture that reformers, advocates, and civilians have sought to change for decades. One guardian of that obstinate culture is the law enforcement field trainer. The Marshall Project shares, “For decades, cities have tried to change the cultures of their police departments, bringing in progressive chiefs and mandating programs to teach officers to become more compassionate and less violent.” The Marshall Project believes that those efforts have not worked. “Field training officers (“FTO”) are a big reason problems persist, according to current and former police leaders, academics and even the US Justice Department.”⁶² It is not difficult to guess why; studies have shown that performance related to skills learned during initial training typically decreases after just a few weeks.⁶³ Therefore, whatever trainees learn with their field officers tends to override what trainees learn in the classroom.

Derek Chauvin, the ex-police officer who murdered George Floyd, was a field trainer. To take steps to change the culture, law enforcement leaders must screen and select officers who are qualified and appropriately trained to fulfill this critical role. The HPD should consider offering incentives for qualified field trainers since they will be required to go above and beyond their traditional duties (e.g., more time spent mentoring, filling out paperwork, providing feedback).

77

Provide accessible and educational training materials for civilians—both about their rights when encountering law enforcement, and about tools that will help them understand the officers’ experiences and points of view.

First and foremost, the HPD must make clear the rights that a civilian has during an encounter with law enforcement. Second, experiential learning programs, such as Texas Southern University’s (“TSU”) “shoot-don’t-shoot” training simulator, can help civilians better understand what police officers face while on duty. Partnering with local universities such as TSU can help offset the costs of such initiatives.

“I’d like to see more training regarding de-escalation and empathy. The community in Houston should not be scared of the police—it should be a relationship based on mutual respect.”

—TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

B) Prioritizing officer health and wellness

[General Order 100-6](#) states: “The department’s employees are its most valuable asset.” If this is the case, committing to the continuous encouragement and support of officer mental health and wellness is essential.

WHY DO POLICE OFFICERS NEED HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAMING?

Police officers and their civilian colleagues see and experience things throughout the course of their career that most of us are fortunate enough to never encounter. In January 2018, Congress enacted the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act, which references the research on occupational risks that affect the approximately 800,000 sworn officers in the United States. Police officer stress results in “higher rates of heart disease, divorce, sick days taken, alcohol abuse, and major psychological illnesses such as acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (“PTSD”), depression, and anxiety disorders.”⁶⁴ Research has shown that health and wellness programs addressing the physical and mental health of officers have a direct impact on the officers, their families, the agency, and the communities they serve. If the officer’s physical and mental health needs are unmet, outcomes can include impaired decision-making abilities, decreased job performance, increased agency costs, and increased risk of self-harm or suicide.⁶⁵

WHAT TYPES OF HEALTH ISSUES ARE COMMON AMONGST POLICE OFFICERS?

Health and psychological disorders affecting police officers include but are not limited to:

Post-traumatic stress disorder (“PTSD”). On average, approximately 15% of officers in the US experience PTSD. This rate is similar to military veterans. The general population rate is 3.5%.

Suicide. Risk of suicide is highest among police officers as compared to any other profession, and is the leading cause of death for officers. The National Alliance on Mental Health reported that one in four police officers has considered committing suicide, and more officers die from suicide each year than they do in the line of duty.

Lower life expectancy. The life expectancy of police officers is fifteen years less on average than the general population. Police officers tend to have higher rates of cardiovascular risk factors such as obesity, hypertension, sleep disorders, and metabolic abnormalities (elevated blood glucose, triglycerides, and cholesterol).

WHAT SERVICES DOES THE HPD PROVIDE CURRENTLY TO ITS OFFICERS?

The HPD has a Psychological Services Division that has seven full-time psychologists who provide free services to both sworn officers and civilian employees, as well as their families. Based on conversations between the Task Force and a psychologist in the Psychological Services Division, the services are currently underutilized. There is no official data on the number of sworn officers or civilian employees who sought treatment, the reasons for treatment, type of treatment provided (individual, marital, or family therapy), or average number of visits.

There are no mandatory or routine psychological evaluations required for HPD officers after the start of their employment, with the exception of four incidents after which psychological evaluations are mandatory ([GO 200-04](#), Assistance to Employees Involved in Critical Incidents; [GO 300-02](#), Transfer of Classified Employees; [GO 300-09](#), Absence from Duty - Classified; and [GO 300-10](#), Transitional Duty). It is important to note that GOs 200-04 and 300-02 have not been updated since August 2013 and July 2014, respectively. It is unknown how effective the Psychological Services Division is in

meeting the emotional and mental needs of the officers and civilian employees who have higher rates of exposure to trauma related incidents or information. It is also important to note that an annual physical exam is not required by the HPD.

WHAT ARE TCOLE'S MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS OF OFFICERS?

Officers can be examined by a psychologist or psychiatrist. They must complete the required approved psychological form within 180 days prior to their date of appointment. The examination must be conducted according to professionally recognized standards and methods and must consist of:

1. Review of a job description for the position sought
2. Review of any personal history statements
3. Review of any background documents
4. Administration of at least two assessments measuring personality traits and psychopathology
5. Face-to-face interview after the instruments have been scored

WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DOES THE TASK FORCE HAVE REGARDING OFFICER HEALTH AND WELLNESS?

12

Conduct psychological evaluations of cadets.⁶⁶

In addition to the minimum TCOLE requirements for acceptance into the Academy Training Program, include at least one Trauma Assessment Tool and the Psychosocial Assessment:

Trauma Assessment Tools

- **Childhood Attachment and Relational Trauma Screen (“CARTS”)** asks about a person’s relationship with key people in their lives when growing up.
- **Global Psychotrauma Screen (“GPS”)** is a 22-item questionnaire with yes/no answers that covers a variety of different potential conditions related to trauma, such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, childhood trauma, substance abuse, problems sleeping, and more.
- **Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS)** is a 30-item questionnaire that is a structured interview.

The benefits of trauma assessment tools are to assist with identifying a history of past trauma and to rate the degree to which the trauma affects the person. Also, one of the screening tools could be used to reassess the officer’s level of trauma during the course of employment.

Psychosocial Assessment

A psychosocial assessment evaluates a person’s mental, physical, and emotional health. It takes into account the person’s perception of self and his or her ability to function in the community. It explores how one’s environment has influenced one’s behavior since early childhood to the present. The primary benefit of a psychosocial assessment is to ensure a standardized interviewing process. This assessment is usually administered by a social worker and takes more than an hour to complete.

13

Update and revise GO 200-04: Assistance to Employees Involved in Critical Incidents.⁶⁷

Post-Critical Incident Intervention

- Make the referral to the Psychological Services Division routine and mandatory. This will not only offer added support to officers, but also work to reduce the stigma of seeking psychological treatment after a critical incident.
- As soon as possible after the incident, a mental health professional, supervisor, or fellow officer should check in with the identified officer(s) involved.
- The employee should have the option to seek treatment from one of psychologists at the Psychological Services Division or from one of the providers through the Employee Assistance Program (“EAP”) who has experience with law enforcement and trauma-related issues.

It was reported that there are approximately 2,000 EAP providers available to HPD employees; however, it is unknown how many of these providers have experience working with police officers or individuals with PTSD, trauma-related disorders, or other emotional/mental conditions most commonly seen in law enforcement. The HPD should compile a list of EAP providers who can best meet the emotional and mental needs of officers based on their level of experience and expertise, and disseminate the list to officers and civilian employees.

74

Implement periodic psychological screening for all officers.⁶⁸

- Screen officers, communications, and crime lab personnel who have increased exposure to trauma-related incidents or occurrences at a minimum of once every twelve months. Currently, the HPD does not perform psychological evaluations beyond the initial screening, unless the officer is being transferred to a specific division as identified by the HPD.
- Monitor stress levels, biases, overall attitude, and coping skills.
- Administer one of the trauma screening tools (CARTS, GPS, or CPS) as listed above.
- Screen for substance/alcohol abuse and suicidal ideations.

Implementation of mandatory and routine psychological or “mental health checks” can be an effective preventive approach to decreasing the suicide rate and psychological sequela reported in law enforcement. The mental health checks would be performed annually for 30-90 minutes. Making the visit routine and mandatory would decrease the stigma of seeking treatment. It is important to note that these visits are not meant to punish or weed-out officers; rather, these checks acknowledge the mental strain of policing, support officers in need, and provide proactive intervention.

75

Increase marketing and utilization of the Psychological Services Division and employee assistance programs.⁶⁹

The psychological services available to the officers and civilian employees are currently underutilized by HPD employees.

- Provide in-service training on mental health topics to include suicide prevention, stress management, PTSD, substance use disorder, domestic violence, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, anger management, single parenting, and officer burnout. Both professional and personal topics should be addressed.
- Conduct surveys to determine officer needs. Leadership will need to be actively involved. We recommend surveys be conducted twice a year.
- Promote and encourage during training the use of psychological services and other resources available to the officers (i.e., peer support groups, helplines, and mentoring programs).
- Disseminate a monthly newsletter electronically. The content should include services provided and contact information for the Psychological Services Division, wellness topics, tips and events, and resource information.
- Identify the EAP providers who have experience counseling law enforcement personnel and providing cognitive behavioral therapy or other trauma therapy modalities.
- Collect additional service-related data, including but not limited to, number of contact visits identified by officers, spouses/significant others, or children of officers, civilians; type of service received; reason for visit; general demographics; no shows; less than 24-hour cancellation; and reason for cancellation.
- Promote COPLINE (a suicide prevention hotline for officers) and HOPA (retired HPD officers trained to listen).
- Continue to encourage participation in the Peer Support Group program.

16

Update and revise GO 300-02: Transfer of Classified Employees, Section 12, Voluntary Transfers.

We recommend that proactive investigators be evaluated and attend a psychological counseling session annually.

17

Implement a health and wellness program.

We recommend that a comprehensive health and wellness program be implemented to assess the physical, mental, and emotional health of the officers and civilian employees on an annual basis. The current Psychological Services Division can be expanded to incorporate yearly mental health checks since the services are currently being underutilized. The Physical Fitness and Agility Program (General Order 300-19), Peer Support Program, Mentorship Program, and other supportive programs and resources could be included under the Wellness Program. We also recommend offering the option to seek ongoing psychological services outside the department.

“ I think all police departments could use a hefty dose of therapy as part of their day-to-day job... not just when there’s an incident.

Just like veterans, if we’re going to ask them to do a dangerous job for us, we have to be there for them, and give them the tools and skills to do the job.”

–TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

C) Offering additional support initiatives

Additional initiatives should be considered to help officers in the field.

18

Institute a Mentorship Program for officers.

The HPD has a significant number of officers on the cusp of retiring, meaning the department as a whole will skew younger for a number of years. The Lansing Police Department instituted a mentorship program at a similar time in its history. New recruits completed a questionnaire and were then paired with a “best available match” from a group of pre-screened and specially trained officers, who supported the recruits through their academy experience and integration into the department.⁷⁰

To serve as a mentor, an officer had to be viewed as a positive role model, have above-average interpersonal skills, and be willing to devote time above and beyond the structured meeting schedule. Mentors also received eight hours of training and were offered refresher courses to discuss their experiences and to provide them with additional tools.⁷¹

19

Solicit input and feedback through a departmental survey and assessment on an annual basis.

Conducting periodic employee input surveys is a common practice in the private sector, as it facilitates real-time feedback-sharing across divisions and ranks. Within the HPD, this process should include departmental interviews, anonymous surveys, a review of policies and procedures, feedback on officer training, and an analysis of performance data. Assessment at regular intervals would more proactively reveal challenges, unmet needs, and patterns of behavior that can be addressed through departmental changes.

20

Issue work phones to HPD officers.

The HPD only issues work phones to select officers, and current policy prohibits officers from using their personal cell phones for work-related matters. In contrast, the NYPD issues smartphones to its officers, allowing them to:

- Replace handwritten memo books with a department app that allows officers to type their notes and immediately send them to a department database. Department officials “say the transition will help eliminate possible abuses, such as faking entries, and having to sort through indecipherable handwriting... It’s not just going from paper to a digital app — it’s changing the culture,” said Chief Tasso.⁷²
- Give officers the ability do quick searches themselves of department databases, instead of waiting for busy radio dispatchers to relay information.⁷³
- Call a city-contracted service that provides immediate access to interpreters in more than 240 languages, allowing them to better serve residents who do not speak English.⁷⁴

Issuing work phones to HPD officers will help streamline officers’ execution of their responsibilities in the field.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A more holistic approach to officer readiness—including in-context training, mental health care, and the full support of the department—is critical to ensure clearer judgment, better decision-making, and sustainable change in the field.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Task Force has taken the initiative to suggest time frames for the implementation of each reform detailed in this section. At a minimum, we would expect a status update on these recommendations within the given range.

SHORT TERM WITHIN 90 DAYS

- 03: Taser training
- 05: SBT training
- 08: Training audit
- 09: Training instructor audit
- 10: Field trainer screening
- 11: Civilian training
- 12: Psychological evaluations
- 13: GO 200-04 revision
- 15: Psychological services
- 16: GO 300-02 revision
- 18: Mentorship program
- 19: Departmental survey

MEDIUM TERM WITHIN 6-12 MONTHS

- 01: De-escalation training
- 02: Implicit bias training
- 04: Disability training
- 06: History of policing module
- 07: Leadership training
- 14: Periodic psychological screening

LONG TERM 1 YEAR+

- 17: Health and wellness program
- 20: Work phones

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Set clear and unambiguous expectations for officers so that they feel supported, know exactly what behavior is required, and understand the consequences of their action or inaction.

WHY 'CLEAR EXPECTATIONS'?

Policies, rules, and expectations should aid officers in their everyday work, not cause confusion or detract from their ability to execute the department's mission to protect and serve our City.

In this section, we will discuss the need for the HPD to ensure that departmental expectations are clearly understood by officers and community members alike. Policies that are not clearly written or that are applied inconsistently make it far too difficult for officers to fulfill their daily responsibilities.

WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DOES THE TASK FORCE HAVE REGARDING EXPECTATION-SETTING WITH OFFICERS?

01

Conduct a complete review and update of the entire HPD General Orders, looking specifically for GOs which contain contradictions or ambiguities, and revise for best practices.

Police officers that we spoke with shared that it can be almost impossible to keep straight all of the rules stated across various documents, including General Orders, Circulars, Executive Orders, the “Meet and Confer” agreement, and training manuals, among others. The HPD should form a small working group to review all written policies and documentation to streamline and consolidate policies that govern all police activities. In addition to including officers and experts in the working group, the HPD should include community representatives and take into account community input to ensure the HPD is practicing policing that continues to reflect the community’s values, needs, and priorities directly related to public safety.

02

Review departmental policies annually to ensure they reflect updated standards and changing best practices.

The HPD’s policies and practices must be continually reviewed, evaluated, and updated to reflect the current best practices and changing needs of the Houston community. Any changes to policies should be accompanied by appropriate officer training. Simply sending out a circular to officers and asking them to internalize it is no longer enough.

03

Publish disciplinary policies internally and stick to them.

Over the course of our research, some officers shared that they felt certain officers received less severe punishment than others for the same misconduct, or that they were not aware that they would be punished for a particular action.

The HPD should publish a “disciplinary schedule,” informed by a review of civilian complaints, departmental complaints, and existing policies. Policy Link recommends creating a “written directive that identifies types of inappropriate behavior and establishes a matrix with ranges of appropriate discipline for each behavior. The schedule helps to conform multiple supervisors’ disciplinary actions to a shared departmental standard.”⁷⁵ Officers should be trained on the disciplinary schedule and refreshed on it each year. This way, discipline will be more consistent and predictable, and officers will have a clear understanding of how their actions will be dealt with by the department.

04

Include “educational” or “positive discipline” as a response to certain misconduct instead of “financial discipline.”

Currently, HPD officers who make a mistake or violate a policy often receive “financial discipline,” meaning the Chief will give them time off without pay. Instead, certain defined violations should result in positive discipline such as counseling or retraining to ensure that an officer understands the policy and can avoid making the same violation in the future.

05

Promote HPD Commanders through the standard, systematic promotional process as opposed to through “civil service.”

All positions above the Commander rank (Assistant Chief, Executive Assistant Chief, and Chief) require selection and appointment by the Chief of Police and/or the Mayor. However, the Commander rank—including Sergeant and Lieutenant ranks—still falls under civil service protection. Civil service protection guarantees Commanders their positions for life, and unless they exhibit gross negligence or egregious misconduct, they can rarely be disciplined or fired.

The Commanders lead entire divisions within the HPD and wield significant authority and influence. Officers in these powerful positions should be held accountable to those that they serve and protect. With the demand for a cultural shift in policing, the Task Force recommends that Commanders be selected by the Chief and subsequently appointed by the Mayor. Additionally, the Chief of Police should have the ability to recommend additional Commanders to the Mayor, if he or she finds it necessary to expand high-level supervision in specific areas.

“Support the ‘good guys’—honest cops who tell the truth and behave in an exemplary fashion should be honored, promoted, and held up as strong positive examples of what it means to be a cop.”

—TASK FORCE SURVEY RESPONDENT

KEY TAKEAWAY

We cannot expect fair and equitable policing if we do not set clear expectations and apply them consistently.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Task Force has taken the initiative to suggest time frames for the implementation of each reform detailed in this section. At a minimum, we would expect a status update on these recommendations within the given range.

SHORT TERM
WITHIN 90 DAYS

- 02: Policy review
- 04: Positive discipline

MEDIUM TERM
WITHIN 6-12 MONTHS

- 01: Update general orders
- 03: Disciplinary policies
- 05: Promotion process

LONG TERM
1 YEAR+

N/A - continue to build on proposed initiatives

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

“When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build... a nation and world society at peace with itself.”

—JOHN LEWIS

Democratic governance can be messy. It can all too easily be derailed by petty fighting, short-term thinking, or bureaucratic inefficiency. But at its best, democracy is fueled by people who listen, engage, and challenge one another to achieve more together than they can alone.

This perspective is no more evident than in the formation of this Task Force and the execution of our work. Writing a clear, cohesive document by committee is hard.

Uniting 45 human beings with different backgrounds, jobs, and dispositions to critically examine complex issues is demanding. We did not always agree with one another. We did not always share the same experiences or viewpoints. But critically, we listened. To each other. To experts. To people on the front lines. To you.

At the end of the day, we, the members of this community-led Task Force, stand united with each other in support of positive change in policing. There are over 100 recommendations included in this report. To sit back and pick apart one or two is to miss the point. As many leaders have already noted, it is far too easy for people from both sides—the community and the police—to hide behind cynical soundbites, incendiary social media posts, or provocative headlines. Rising above these all-to-easy, idle responses will take hard work. But it is necessary work. Good work.

We approached our Mayor’s charge with guiding principles that helped shape our analysis and recommendations. These principles included transparency, accountability, community

involvement, diversity and inclusion, leadership, and a holistic understanding of health and wellness, for both sides. *For both sides.* Critically, we did not come to the table pointing fingers. We did not and do not seek to further a divide between “us” and “them.” The only way to create meaningful, lasting change in policing is through a mutual partnership between the police and those that they serve: the community.

Changing culture is a movement, not a mandate. Long-term change in any organization is dependent on both its leadership and its people. Leaders must serve as models for change through their words and actions. It is not enough to offer up cheap assurances or say the “right” thing on TV. Change is hard, and humans are notoriously bad at accepting it. Therefore, leaders must also mentor and support their front-line workers as they adjust to a new reality. Culture will change when people feel respected, internalize the department’s mission and purpose, and are equipped to carry out that mission every day.

This process and this report are just the beginning. Phase one.

The next step is implementation. We cannot do it alone. The Mayor cannot do it alone. The HPD cannot do it alone. So, we ask you: where do you stand? Will you critique from afar? Will you stay on the sidelines and do nothing? Or will you participate with us, take ownership, and demand action?

Stand with us now, for change.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Mayor’s Task Force on Policing Reform
Houston, Texas



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- Daniel Garcia
- Sergeant Domingo Garcia
- Ray Hunt
- Sergeant DeAndre Hutchison
- Jonathan Lack
- Christian Menefee
- Sergeant Roland Nieto
- Chief Victor Rodriguez
- Officer Jed Rose
- Ray Shackelford
- AAPOL
- Crime Stoppers
- Eta Rho Sigma Alumni Chapter of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity
- Houston Area Urban League and their survey respondents
- Houston Commission on Disabilities
- Houston Office of New Americans and Immigrant Communities
- Houston Peace and their youth survey respondents
- Mayor’s LGBTQ Advisory Board
- Theta Chi Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity

APPENDIX A:

For Such a Time as This

Written by Laurence J. “Larry” Payne,
Chair, The Mayor’s Task Force on Policing Reform
September 2020

1. Building lives full of the promise of tomorrow requires addressing the underlying systematic inequities highlighted by recent events.
2. True solidarity requires humanity, acceptance, and shared experiences, especially during difficult times.
3. This moment is an opportunity to acknowledge the urgent need to fight the racial and economic inequities that we, as a society, have allowed to persist, far too long.
4. To be empowered is to be able to act. Power is the ability, capacity and willingness of a person, a group of people or an institution, to act.
5. To change the system – What is a system? An organized body of people gathered around values and structures and individuals.
6. Values are defined; structures are put in place to implement systems: people are identified to maintain structure/ institutions.
7. Systemic Change occurs when value, structures, and individuals change.
8. We must create space for ourselves to see through someone else’s eyes.
9. What is known as unconscious or implied bias is what holds us back and blocks the best intentions and attempts of so many to achieve meaningful change.
10. It is time for a re-centering in this country on how we are supposed to treat each other. Rather than how we are not supposed to treat each other.
11. Remember, you cannot protest an idea; you can only counter it with a better idea.
12. Our ability to exercise extreme empathy toward everyone in our communities and beyond will determine what kind of Houston we leave for other generations to imagine.

APPENDIX B:

Must-reads on policing reform

Submitted by Dr. Howard Henderson,
Founding Director of the Center for Justice Research at TSU
September 2020

1. Race and the Houston Police Department, 1930-1990 ([Amazon](#))
2. US: 14 Recommendations for Fundamental Police Reform; Improve Public Safety by Reducing Policing, Investing in Communities ([Human Rights Watch](#))
3. Campaign Zero - information about existing policies ([Campaign Zero](#))
4. Policing Black Bodies: How Black Lives are Surveilled and How to Work for Change ([Rowman & Littlefield](#))
5. State of Opportunity in American Report ([Advancing Opportunity](#))
6. Meaningful Police Reform Requires Accountability and Cultural Sensitivity ([Brookings Institute](#))
7. Officer-Involved Shootings in Texas (2016-2019) ([Texas Justice Initiative](#))
8. Most Americans Say Policing Needs “Major Changes” ([Gallup](#))
9. The Racist Roots of American Policing: From Slave Patrols to Traffic Stops ([The Conversation](#))
10. The President’s Role in Advancing Criminal Justice Reform ([Harvard Law Review](#))
11. Before attempting to reform the police, we must discover what actually works ([Marketwatch](#))
12. Chokehold: Policing Black Men ([Amazon](#))
13. Hands Up, Don’t Shoot ([Amazon](#))

APPENDIX C:

Additional work on body-worn cameras (“BWC”)

RELEVANT BWC POLICIES AND TRENDS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

34 states across the United States have BWC programs and policies to regulate the use of the technology. Below is a short list of various states and their BWC policies (as of September 2020). In Figure 9, we present an overview of the BWC policies in effect in various states, counties, and cities.

CURRENT POLICIES AROUND THE COUNTRY

Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Police Department does not release videos of critical incidents to the public unless it is ordered to do so by a court, or the video is used at trial. The department may sometimes choose to release surveillance camera videos of critical incidents rather than release the BWC video as was the case with the shooting of Carnell Snell.

Baltimore: The Baltimore Police Department’s BWC policy follows the guidelines of the Maryland Public Information Act which states that records shall be released as long as release does not interfere with a law enforcement proceeding or constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. The new BPD body-worn camera policy gives the police commissioner a week after police-involved shooting to determine whether to release the footage to the public. BWC video alteration and/or immediate release of critical incident footage to the public for safety reasons is at the discretion of the Chief of Police.

Arlington, TX: BWC video may be released to the public with exemptions, in accordance with Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code, and departmental procedures. Data can be accessed for criminal investigation or prosecution as required through the evidentiary sharing process. The BWC files will not be released to non-criminal justice agencies without approval of the legal advisor. If the evidence is needed for internal police department investigations, it will not be released without approval from the Internal Affairs section.

Atlanta: Videos may be released to the public in accordance with the Atlanta Police Department Standard Operating Procedure 1060 “Public Affairs.” The Chief of Police or his/her designee shall be the final approving authority regarding the BWC and all recordings and data release as it relates to the media/press or general public.

Boston: The Boston Police Department’s BWC policy states that recordings may be requested by the public through a public records request, as defined in Chapter 66, Section 10 of Massachusetts General Laws (“MGL”). The Boston police department shall at reasonable times and without unreasonable delay permit inspection or furnish a copy of any public record as defined in clause twenty-sixth of Section 7 of Chapter 4, or any portion of a public record, not later than ten business days following the receipt of the request.

Cincinnati: This department requires that the public request BWC videos through Form 29, Police Public Records Request. Police Records Supervising (“PRS”) Management Analyst must approve and complete any records requests. Media requests for recordings will be approved by the Public Information Office. Release of any recordings relating to instances of driving under the influence will be approved by the prosecutor. PRS will release records and reports pursuant to ORC 149.43 within a reasonable time. All requests for BWC/DVR video files must be made prior to the end of the 90-day retention and availability period. After the 90-day retention period, recordings not categorized for retention are automatically deleted.

Cleveland: The Cleveland Police Department BWC policy states that the public can request any BWC footage through a public records requests, which must clearly state the records and/or information being sought. The release of media is done under the Cleveland Public Record Policy in accordance with the Ohio Public Records Law, Ohio Rev. Code Section 149.43 (H). The Chief of Police handles requests to release media to outside parties. Public records must be made available for inspection promptly and copies of public records must be made available within a reasonable period of time.

New Orleans: The New Orleans Police Department superintendent shall determine within 48 hours of receiving a written recommendation regarding release of the recording(s), whether the BWC footage shall be released to the public under this Directive or withheld, subject to the Court’s review as set forth in Section 9. Recordings of critical incidents to be released shall be made available to the public as soon as practicable following the determination of release.

Chicago: The BWC policy of the Chicago Police Department states that BWC footage of critical incidents must be made public within 60 days of the incident and a 30-day extension may be applied upon request from the department, state or prosecutors. The video may be released earlier at the department’s discretion.

Las Vegas: The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department’s BWC policy requires that BWC videos of officer-involved shootings be made public approximately five to ten days after the incident. The department will disclose all necessary information at a press briefing.

San Diego County: The Police departments in San Diego County are only able to disclose BWC videos to the public after the District Attorney completes its investigation of the incident and decides not to bring criminal charges either against the officer or civilian involved. If the District Attorney decides to bring charges, video is only made public at trial or at the conclusion of the case.

Note: There are exceptions to all body camera policies—in some cases (like the interview of victims of assault or sexual abuse) officers are encouraged to use discretion on whether or not to turn on their body-worn cameras.

Fig 9. BWC video release policies around the country (as of September 2020)

City, State	Non-evidentiary video kept for 1+ month(s)	Public view body camera footage	Time frame of video release	Department policy	City policy	State policy
Aransas Pass, TX	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Arlington, TX	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Atlanta, GA	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	No	Yes
Austin, TX	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	No	Yes
Baltimore, MD	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Boston, MA	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	No	Yes
Charlotte, NC	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Chicago, IL	Yes	Not specified	No	No	No	Yes
Cincinnati, OH	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Cleveland, OH	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Dallas, TX	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Denver, CO	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ferguson, MI	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Florida	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Fort Worth, TX	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

City, State	Non-evidentiary video kept for 1+ month(s)	Public view body camera footage	Time frame of video release	Department policy	City policy	State policy
Houston, TX	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Jacksonville, FL	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Kentucky	N/A	No	No	No	No	No
Las Vegas, NV	Yes	WC*	No	Yes	No	No
Los Angeles, CA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Mesa, AZ	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Minneapolis, MN	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
New Orleans, LA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
New York, NY	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
North Dakota	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Oakland, CA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Orlando, FL	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Philadelphia, PA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Phoenix, AZ	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Rialto, CA	Yes	WC*	No	Yes	No	Yes
San Antonio, TX	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
San Bernardino, CA	Yes	WC*	No	No	No	Yes
San Diego, CA	Yes	WC*	No	No	No	Yes
San Francisco, CA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
San Jose, CA	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Seattle, WA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Tampa, FL	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Tucson, AZ	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Washington, DC	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

—
NOTE: "WC*" indicates "Yes, but with conditions."

From Figure 9, we observe that most states and cities keep BWC footage for at least a month. Only eight states and/or cities have a set time frame of when to release BWC video footage to the public when requested. This may be because the majority of the states and cities with BWC programs do not have detailed BWC video release policies or guidelines. Even when policies allow public access to BWC video, the video is often only released at the police chief's discretion, as is the case with the HPD. Despite the implementation of BWCs to hold police officers and the community accountable, police departments hardly ever release videos for independent review.

Using the data in Figure 9, we determined that 13% of the states and cities present have a designated time frame of five to 30 days after the incident or request filed, within which they have to release BWC video footage to the public. The majority (79%) of the states and cities do not have a set time frame within which they are required to release BWC footage to the public, and only 8% are required to release their BWC video footage within 45 days of the incident.



APPENDIX D:

Comparison of the HPD's CIRT model to national standards

STANDARD CIT MODEL

Staff is **appropriately trained** and demonstrates competence in understanding the population of individuals served, including not only a clinical perspective, but also their lived experiences.

HPD CIRT MODEL

All CIRT clinicians are **licensed professional counselors or licensed clinical social workers** with crisis experience—including in jails, prisons, and community mental health facilities. CIRT clinicians and law enforcement partner to ensure adequate assessment and safety. Officers and deputies who work CIRT are all trained in CIT by teachers with lived experience in serious mental illness.

Staff and leadership understand, accept and promote the concepts of recovery and resilience; the value of consumer partnerships and consumer choice; and the balance between protection from harm and personal dignity. Staff have **timely access to critical information**, such as an individual's health history, psychiatric advance directives, or crisis plans.

CIRT leadership and staff have access to The Harris Center, Harris Health Epic, and HCPC Sunrise medical records databases. Where possible, individuals are identified and researched before the team arrives on scene. Doing so helps the team **build rapport quickly** with the individual; reduces the need for the patient to repeat mental health and medical information; aids in a thorough assessment; increases continuity of care if the individual has a history with The Harris Center; and improves continuity of care as the outpatient clinic staff is informed of the CIRT contact.

Staff is afforded the **flexibility, resources, and time** to establish truly individualized person-centered plans to address the immediate crisis and beyond.

CIRT is **single-contact**, and the goal is to assess for a mental health crisis, provide education to the individual in crisis and the family on scene, and link to services. If the individual is admitted to the hospital, the case is closed by CIRT due to privacy laws. If the patient has an open case with The Harris Center, the clinic caseworker and doctor are informed that the patient was admitted to the hospital, so the clinic can follow up. If the call is resolved on scene because the person was deemed to not be in crisis, the CIRT clinician makes a referral to The Harris Center clinic line to follow up with the individual.

STANDARD CIT MODEL

Staff is empowered and encouraged to **work in partnership** with individuals being served, with appropriate organizational oversight, to craft and implement novel solutions.

.....

Organizational culture **does not isolate** its programs or its staff from its surrounding community, nor from the community of individuals it serves. The organization does not limit its focus to “specific” patient-level interventions, but positions itself to play a meaningful role in promoting **“indicated” strategies** for the high-risk population it serves and **“universal” strategies** that target prevention within the general population.

.....

Coordination and collaboration with outside entities is critical for exchanging **referrals**. This engagement is not limited to service providers within formal networks, but also includes relevant natural networks of support.

.....

Rigorous **performance improvement programs** use data meaningfully to refine individuals’ crisis care and improve program outcomes. Performance improvement programs are also used to identify and address risk factors or unmet needs that have an impact on referrals to the organization and the vulnerability to continuing crises of individuals served.

HPD CIRT MODEL

CIRT staff are involved in community organizations like **NAMI and MHA**, and conduct community education and presentations of services offered.

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CIRT is **field-based** and takes calls 24/7 in the community. CIRT staff also attend community health fairs, present at high schools and colleges, and train new officers via the law enforcement CIT 1850 mental health class. CIRT conducts **site visits** for other law enforcement agencies that are interested in developing their own CIRT programs and attends safety town hall meetings.

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CIRT takes calls from 911 dispatch with a mental health component. The team also **takes referrals** from The Harris Center crisis line and Mobile Crisis Outreach Team that are calls from the community. CIRT is also on all SWAT calls and completes referrals from The Harris Center administrations and law enforcement that originate from the community.

.....

CIRT is involved in The Harris Center’s performance improvement committees. Since CIRT is a crisis program, assessments must be entered into medical databases so real-time information can be provided to the referral source. Since engaging with performance improvement, CIRT’s compliance with performance improvement targets has improved from over 95% compliance to **99% compliance**.

APPENDIX E:

Other law enforcement collaborations with the HPD Mental Health Division

HOMELESS OUTREACH TEAM (“HOT”)

The Homeless Outreach Team (“HOT”) is a team of specialized officers who collaborate with mental health care coordinators to assist individuals who are homeless. HOT goes to wherever the individuals are located. Six HPD officers are assigned to HOT. HOT reached 2,878 people in state fiscal year 2019.

CHRONIC CONSUMER STABILIZATION INITIATIVE (“CCSI”)

The Chronic Consumer Stabilization Initiative (“CCSI”) is a collaboration between the HPD and The Harris Center. One HPD officer is assigned to CCSI. CCSI identified a group of people with serious mental illness who have frequent encounters with the HPD. The Harris Center’s care coordinators engage with these individuals to participate in community-based services and reduce the number of law enforcement encounters and psychiatric hospitalizations. A comparison of client outcomes one year before and after receiving CCSI services include:

- 61% reduction in admissions to psychiatric facilities
- 66% reduction in Harris County Psychiatric Center in-patient days
- 66% decrease in overall encounters with law enforcement while on the CCSI program. CCSI currently serves 45 individuals diagnosed with serious and persistent mental illness. (HPD, Annual Report, 2019)

HARRIS COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH JAIL DIVERSION PROGRAM

The Harris County Mental Health Jail Diversion Program is a pre-booking jail diversion program for individuals with mental health needs who would have been arrested for low-level, non-violent offenses, like trespassing. Law enforcement officers drop off these individuals at the Judge Ed Emmett Mental Health Diversion Center where they receive an array of community-based services, referrals, and linkages to other services, such as housing. The Harris County District Attorney, the HPD, HCSO, and other law enforcement agencies are essential partners. The program diverted 1,795 individuals who would have otherwise been arrested in state fiscal year 2019.



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INTRODUCTION

1. “The fierce urgency of now” is a reference to a quote by Martin Luther King, Jr.: “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”
2. See Appendix A: For Such a Time as This
3. As US District Court Judge Carlton W. Reeves wrote in his scathing and riveting opinion in *Jamison vs. McClendon*, Black people in America have been killed by the police when they were first approached for committing minor crimes like jaywalking, selling “loose, untaxed cigarettes,” making an improper lane change, having a broken tail light, driving over the speed limit, or driving under the speed limit. Were these examples not alarming enough, Black Americans have been killed by the police for engaging in completely innocent and legal behavior such as playing with a toy gun in a public park, looking suspicious, not looking like someone suspected of committing a crime, being mentally ill and in need of help, providing assistance to an autistic patient who wandered away from a group home, walking home from an after school job, walking back from a restaurant, hanging out on a college campus, standing outside his own apartment, eating ice cream inside his own apartment, sleeping in her own bed, sleeping in his own car.

Each of these examples comes with a name: Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott, Hannah Fizer, Ace Perry, 12 year old Tamir Rice, Elijah McClain, Philando Castile, Tony McDade, Jason Harrison, Charles Kinsey, 17 year old James Earl Green, Ben Brown, Philip Gibbs, Amadou Diallo, Botham Jean, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/7013933-Jamison-v-McClendon.html>; See Max Ehrenfreund, *The Risks of Walking While Black in Ferguson*, The Washington Post, March 4, 2015; See Associated Press: *From Eric Garner’s death to firing of NYPD officer: A timeline of key events*. USA Today. August 20, 2019. Ben Mathis-Lilley and Elliott Hannon, *A Black Woman named Sandra Bland got pulled over in Texas and died in jail three days later. Why?*, Slate, July 16, 2015. See Michael E. Miller et al, *How a cell phone video led to murder charges against a cop in North Charleston, S.C.*, The Washington Post, April 8, 2015. See Luke Nozicka, *‘Where’s the gun?’: Family of Sedalia Woman killed by deputy skeptical of narrative*, Kansas City Star, June 15, 2020. Jodi Leese Glusco, *Run-in with Sampson deputy leaves driver feeling unsafe*, WRAL, February 14, 2020. See Zola Ray, *This is the Toy Gun that Got Tamir Rice Killed Three Years Ago Today*. Newsweek, November 22, 2017. See Claire Lampen, *What We Know About the Killing of Elijah McClain*. The Cut. July 5, 2020. See Andy Mannix, *Police audio: Officer stopped Philando Castile on robbery suspicion*, Star Tribune, July 12, 2016; Meredith Delisco, *LGBTQ community calls for justice after Tony McDade, a black trans man, shot and killed by police*, ABC News, June

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4. This awakening is due in large part to the fact that eight minutes and forty-six seconds of video showed the world the slow, callous, casual murder of Houston native George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derrick Chauvin. Suddenly, what had been common knowledge in the African American community became undeniable to the rest of Americans: systemic racism is a deadly problem in our land. George Floyd's alleged crime was using an allegedly counterfeit twenty dollar bill to make a purchase from a convenience store. And for that—now capital—offense officer Chauvin looked around calmly with his hands in his pockets and his knee on George Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. While George Floyd called out for his mother and declared that he could not breathe, officer Chauvin crushed the life out of him.
5. Between 2014-2019 Blacks were more than four times more likely than Whites to be arrested by an HPD officer and made up 51% percent of the population of the Harris County jail. Black citizens represent 63% of civilians shot by HPD officers between 2017 and 2019. Moreover, between 2013 and 2019 Black people were more than four times as likely as White people in Harris county to be killed by a police officer. See this 2019 data revealing use of force during traffic stops by police across the region: http://racialprofiling.nuvola-networks.com/racial_profiling_forms/year/2018/reported/all. See an article on the data here: <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Multiple-Houston-area-police-departments-among-13686052.php>; see also: https://www.understandinghouston.org/topic/community-context/criminal-justice#incarcerated_population
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9. August 6, 2020 during the Chief's Q&A with the Task Force at the George Theater.
10. A fundamental truth of the Christian faith is that Jesus was unjustly murdered by the state via crucifixion, a manner of execution designed to rob the victim of all human dignity. In eight separate places the New Testament reiterates the Levitical imperative to "love your neighbor as yourself." The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans makes this ethical imperative the *summum bonum* of Christian ethics. Romans 13:9 reads, "The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Hence, guarding the dignity of others and treating all people with "agape" (self-giving) love are basic requirements for Christian living.
11. Judaism holds the value of equitable justice to be among the most important attributes of a society. Included in the seven laws that are believed to be required of all humanity, the one positive commandment is to have a fair and equitable justice system. This requires that all stand equally before the law. In Deuteronomy we are commanded "פְּדוּת קִדְּשׁ קִדְּשׁ Justice, Justice, you shall pursue!" (Deuteronomy 16:20a). This is a command that the pursuit of justice is something that we must strive for. It is something that must be demanded of those who are sworn to protect and serve society. Earlier in Deuteronomy when commanding the magistrates, those sworn to enforce Law for the nation of Israel, Moses directs them thusly: "I charged our magistrates at that time as follows, 'Hear out your fellow men, and decide justly between any man and a fellow Israelite or a stranger. You shall not be partial in judgement: hear out low and high alike. Fear no man, for judgement is God's.'" (Deuteronomy 1:16-17) This verse talks of the care that those who take responsibility for justice in society must act with extra care that they treat all people the same. They are to listen to both the haves and have-nots, they are to treat those who are like them and different in a similar fashion. Lastly, they are to have the humility to realize that ultimate judgement belongs to God. As such one need be extremely careful in a situation that can lead to the loss of life. We must ensure systems are in place to equip our officers with the skills so that they can live up to the ideals articulated in scripture, specifically the equitable administration of justice.
12. Imam Tauqeer H. Shah, Resident Scholar at the Brand Lane Islamic Center and member of the Islamic Society of Greater Houston wrote our committee to say, "The Quran states 'You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly- if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.' -Quran 4:135. Reflecting on this verse, we believe that it is our responsibility and duty to collectively work with individuals and communities in the greater Houston area to help find a solution to this disturbing trend of bigotry and racism."
13. The Buddhist text, the Dhammapada states, "**129.** All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill. **130.** All tremble at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not

kill nor cause another to kill. **131.** One who, while himself seeking happiness, oppresses with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will not attain happiness hereafter. **132.** One who, while himself seeking happiness, does not oppress with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will find happiness hereafter.”

14. Sanjay Ahuja wrote us to say, “In Hinduism all of our scriptures have references as to all being Equal and no disparity in our beliefs. Vedas are the most ancient Hindu scriptures and all our Vedic traditions do believe in “Oneness” of the being and manifestations in different forms.

Vedic Scripture – Quote Yajur Veda.40.6 & 7

yastu sarvāni bhūtāni ātmanyeva anupaśyati |
sarva-bhūte u cātmānam tato na vijugupsate ||

English Translation

He who realizes all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings,
Feels no hatred by virtue of that realization.”

15. Bhai Kulbeer Singh Akal Garh wrote, “The Perspective of Gurbani about ‘fairly treated and equality’ is based on OneNess. There are many Gurbani hymns pausing, reflecting and understanding about what an egalitarian society looks like. As Bhagat Ravidas Ji says, ‘Dom Na Same Ek So Aahi’ (There is no second or third status, all are equal there). The differences we witness everyday in routine life are because of ignorance. Guru Arjan Sahib Ji says, “ Jaise Raaj Runk Ko Laagai Tull Pavaan” (Wind blows equally upon the king and the poor). So, the essential things for physical life we all share, are for each and everyone. We all have the Same Light in and around us.”
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