

Testimony of

Colonel Dean Esserman

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

NEW STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING VIOLENT CRIME: LESSONS LEARNED FROM RECENT EXPERIENCE

WRITTEN TESTIMONY AND EXHIBITS

BY

COLONEL DEAN M. ESSERMAN

CHIEF OF POLICE

PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

GOOD MORNING MR. CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE MEMBERS, MY NAME IS DEAN ESSERMAN AND I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY BEFORE YOUR COMMITTEE. I SIT HERE IN FRONT OF YOU TODAY AS ONE OF AMERICA'S POLICE CHIEFS. I HAVE BEEN THE CHIEF OF POLICE OF THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE FOR FIVE AND A HALF YEARS. PROVIDENCE IS THE CAPITOL OF RHODE ISLAND AND THE SECOND LARGEST CITY IN NEW ENGLAND. THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE PROPER ENCOMPASSES A VERY HIGH CONCENTRATION OF OUR METROPOLITAN AREA'S RESIDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY; WE ARE IN FACT AMONG THE TOP FIVE POOREST CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES FOR CHILDREN. AND FOR TOO LONG WE WERE ALSO A CITY THAT SAW TOO MUCH VIOLENCE, ESPECIALLY VIOLENCE AMONG OUR YOUNG, AMONG OUR CHILDREN. A CITY WHERE TOO MANY CHILDREN, OUR CHILDREN, WERE BEING SHOT, AND TOO MANY BEING BURIED.

I AM VERY PROUD TO SAY THAT THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT WHO I PROUDLY REPRESENT TODAY, "PROVIDENCE'S FINEST" HAVE STARTED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, TO TURN THE TIDE. FOR MORE THAN FIVE YEARS CRIME HAS BEEN GOING DOWN IN PROVIDENCE. LED BY AN ENERGETIC AND REFORM-MINDED MAYOR, DAVID CICILLINE, THE PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT HAS DONE MORE THAN TRANSFORM ITS STRATEGIES AND TACTICS. THE DEPARTMENT HAS UNDERGONE AN EXTENSIVE REENGINEERING AND HAS FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGED THE WAY IT THINKS ABOUT ITSELF AND ITS WORK.

IN THE PAST, THE DEPARTMENT SAW ITSELF LIKE MANY. POLICE WERE LIKE ARMED REFEREES WHO KEPT AN AUTHORITATIVE DISTANCE - TO THE POINT OF BEING ALMOST ANONYMOUS - WHILE TRYING TO MAINTAIN ORDER IN A COMMUNITY THAT WAS NOT THEIR OWN.

I WAS RECRUITED BY THE MAYOR TO CHANGE THAT. I WAS ASKED TO BRING THE COMMUNITY POLICING PHILOSOPHY TO PROVIDENCE. COMMUNITY POLICING MEANS BECOMING ENMESHED IN THE COMMUNITY. OUR IMPROVEMENT AS A POLICE DEPARTMENT HAS DIRECTLY COINCIDED WITH OUR ABILITY TO MAKE THAT TRANSFORMATION. WE ARE AS PROFESSIONAL AS ANY POLICE DEPARTMENT IN THE COUNTRY, BUT WE REJECT THE IDEA OF BEING ANONYMOUS REFEREES. WE ARE PART OF THE COMMUNITY.

IN OUR REENGINEERING EFFORTS, WE HAVE ADOPTED THE LESSONS LEARNED OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES IN AMERICAN POLICING OF WHAT WORKS. FIRST, WE HAVE EMBRACED AND INSTITUTED COMMUNITY POLICING, DECENTRALIZING THE DEPARTMENT, AND DIVIDING THE CITY INTO NEIGHBORHOOD POLICE DISTRICTS. EACH DISTRICT HAS A COMMUNITY DONATED NEIGHBORHOOD SUBSTATION OFFICE AND A COMMANDER ACCOUNTABLE TO THE RESIDENTS AND TO THE DEPARTMENT.

SECOND, THE MANAGEMENT TOOL ADOPTED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO OVERSEE OUR NEWLY DECENTRALIZED OPERATIONS IS WEEKLY DETECTIVE AND COMMAND STAFF MEETINGS DRIVEN BY TIMELY AND ACCURATE CRIME STATISTICS (OFTEN KNOWN AS THE NEW YORK CITY COMPSTAT MODEL). ACCOUNTABILITY IS EMPHASIZED BY DETECTIVE AND PATROL SUPERVISORS GATHERING WEEKLY TO REVIEW INCIDENTS, EVENTS, COORDINATE ACTIVITIES, AND SHARE CRITICAL INFORMATION. MOREOVER, THE DEPARTMENT HAS EMBRACED THE IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN PROFESSOR KELLING'S WORK, WELL KNOWN AS "BROKEN WINDOWS." WE FOCUS OUR RESOURCES ON SERIOUS VIOLENT CRIMES AND NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE OFFENSES WITH EQUAL EFFORTS.

IMPORTANTLY, THE DEPARTMENT HAS RELIED ON THE THREE FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY POLICING; PARTNERSHIP, PREVENTION, AND PROBLEM SOLVING TO IMPLEMENT ITS CRIME-FIGHTING STRATEGIES. EACH STRATEGY RELATES BACK TO THE DEPARTMENT'S CORE MISSION TO REDUCE CRIME, REDUCE FEAR AND DISORDER, AND ENHANCE HOMELAND SECURITY AWARENESS THROUGHOUT THE CITY. THE RESULTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES. OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS CRIME IS DOWN 30% AND HOMICIDES HAVE BEEN CUT NEARLY IN HALF. THIS REPRESENTS THE LOWEST LEVEL IN THIRTY YEARS. AS IMPORTANTLY, THERE IS A STRONG AND GROWING SENSE OF TRUST AND PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY AND THE POLICE DEPARTMENT. WHEN WE FORM COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, WE ARE NOT JUST MEETING, WE ARE NOT JUST VISITING, WE ARE STAYING.

THE PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT TAKES GREAT PRIDE IN STUDYING, MODIFYING AND IMPLEMENTING THE BEST PRACTICES FROM ACROSS OUR NATION. LET ME OUTLINE A FEW OF OUR PARTNERSHIP AND PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGIES:

? THE DEPARTMENT FORMED A GUN TASK FORCE THAT SPECIALIZES IN CONDUCTING BOTH SHORT AND LONG-TERM INVESTIGATIONS INTO ILLEGAL FIREARMS POSSESSION, USE AND TRAFFICKING. THE GUN TASK FORCE WORKS CLOSELY WITH THE BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, FIREARMS, AND EXPLOSIVES. FOR EVERY GUN ARREST IN PROVIDENCE, AN ATF AGENT AND A PROVIDENCE POLICE DETECTIVE INTERVIEW THE SUSPECT. THE DEPARTMENT ALSO PARTNERED ON A PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE WITH THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE AND THE RHODE ISLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE FOCUSING ON THE COORDINATION AND FEDERAL PROSECUTION OF ALL ELIGIBLE GUN CASES. THE FEDERAL ADOPTION OF CASES COUPLED WITH LONG PRISON SENTENCES IN FEDERAL PRISONS SENDS A STRONG MESSAGE THAT GUN CRIMES WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN PROVIDENCE.

? THE DEPARTMENT PARTNERED WITH THE RHODE ISLAND LOCAL INITIATIVE SUPPORT CORPORATION (LISC) TO TRANSFORM DISTRESSED NEIGHBORHOODS INTO VIBRANT AND HEALTHY PLACES. WE WORK WITH OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS ENCOURAGING HOME OWNERSHIP AND PROVIDING CAPITAL INVESTMENT FOR REAL ESTATE PROJECTS. THE PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT WORKS CLOSELY WITH THE LISC SPONSORED COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF PERSISTENT CRIME, DISORDER, AND FEAR. THE DEPARTMENT RECEIVED THREE METLIFE FOUNDATION COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AWARDS OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS.

? THE DEPARTMENT PARTNERED WITH THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF NONVIOLENCE. PURSUING AN INITIATIVE FIRST BORN IN BOSTON IN THE 1990s, INSTITUTE STAFF KNOWN AS STREET WORKERS ARE CERTIFIED NONVIOLENCE TRAINERS AND VETERANS OF LIFE ON THE STREET - OFTEN FORMER GANG MEMBERS - TEACH THE PRINCIPLES OF NONVIOLENCE DEVELOPED BY DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. FOR RECONCILING CONFLICT. STREET WORKERS INTERVENE IN POTENTIALLY VIOLENT SITUATIONS, OFFERING MEDIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION SERVICES, AND HELP PREVENT RETALIATION OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE BY OFFERING NONVIOLENT SOLUTIONS. STREET WORKERS VISIT SHOOTING SCENES AND EMERGENCY ROOMS IN AN EFFORT TO QUICKLY STEM-OFF RETALIATION. STREET WORKERS OFFER SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY-BASED CRISIS INTERVENTION, MEDIATION, AND SERVE AS MENTORS TO AT-RISK YOUTH. THE PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT AND THE STREET WORKERS WORK IN TANDEM TO ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE WITH SOME OF THE MOST VIOLENT CITY COMBATANTS IN REAL OR PERCEIVED DISPUTES. STREET WORKERS APPEAR IN "FULL FORCE" IN TIME OF CRISIS AND IN OPEN DISPUTES. BY WORKING ALL "HOT-SPOTS," THE STREET WORKERS ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE FEUDING SIDES AND ARE EQUIPPED TO ASSIST IN PARTICULAR CASES.

? THE DEPARTMENT PARTNERED WITH FAMILY SERVICE OF RHODE ISLAND WHICH IS THE OLDEST AND LARGEST NON-PROFIT HUMAN SERVICE AGENCY IN RHODE ISLAND TO REPLICATE AND ENHANCE THE COMMUNITY POLICING-CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OF POLICE AND MENTAL-HEALTH CLINICIANS FIRST PIONEERED BY THE YALE CHILD STUDY CENTER AND THE NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT POLICE DEPARTMENT IN 1992. TOGETHER, WE CREATED A "POLICE GO TEAM" IN WHICH A TRAINED SOCIAL SERVICE CLINICIAN IS CALLED TO A CRIME SCENE TO TREAT VICTIMS AS WELL AS PROVIDE FOLLOW-UP SERVICES TO THE VICTIM, THE VICTIM'S FAMILY, AND THE POLICE OFFICERS RESPONDING TO THE SCENE. THESE CLINICIANS RIDE IN PATROL CARS EVERY NIGHT AS PARTNERS WITH OFFICERS ON ACTIVE PATROL.

? THE DEPARTMENT PARTNERED WITH THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION WHERE PROBATION OFFICERS ARE ASSIGNED TO NEIGHBORHOOD POLICE DISTRICT OFFICES AND THEIR CASELOAD IS SPECIFIC TO THAT NEIGHBORHOOD. THEY SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT THOSE RETURNING TO THE COMMUNITY, PARTICIPATE IN MEET AND GREET ORIENTATION MEETINGS, AND PROVIDE MUCH NEEDED OVERSIGHT AND DIRECTION TO THOSE RETURNING TO THE COMMUNITY.

? AND FINALLY, IN 2006, THE NATIONAL AND RHODE ISLAND URBAN LEAGUES APPROACHED THE DEPARTMENT ABOUT WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT A DRUG MARKET INTERVENTION INITIATIVE IN THE LOCKWOOD PLAZA NEIGHBORHOOD OF PROVIDENCE. THE DRUG MARKET INTERVENTION INITIATIVE IS BASED ON THE INITIAL WORK OF JOHN JAY PROFESSOR DAVID KENNEDY IN HIGH POINT, NORTH CAROLINA.

LOCKWOOD PLAZA WAS NOTORIOUS FOR OPEN AIR-DRUG DEALING AND VIOLENT CRIME. THE DEPARTMENT BEGAN A JOINT INVESTIGATION WITH THE DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION, THE RHODE ISLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE, AND THE U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE TARGETING STREET AND MID-LEVEL DEALERS OF CRACK COCAINE IN THE LOCK PLAZA NEIGHBORHOOD.

THE LOCKWOOD INITIATIVE IS A TREMENDOUS SUCCESS IN BRINGING CRIME DOWN AND RESTORING A SENSE OF CLAM AND HOPE TO THE CITIZENS OF LOCKWOOD. THE CULMINATION OF THE EFFORT COULD BE SEEN THIS PAST JULY WHEN PROVIDENCE HOSTED A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE SPONSORED DRUG MARKET INTERVENTION WORKSHOP AND INVITED ALL THE PARTICIPANTS TO A LOCKWOOD COMMUNITY CELEBRATION COOKOUT. OVER ONE HUNDRED COMMUNITY MEMBERS ATTENDED THE EVENT AND THE WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS SAW THE REMARKABLE TURNAROUND MADE IN THE LOCKWOOD PLAZA NEIGHBORHOOD.

MANY OF THE INITIATIVES THAT I HAVE OUTLINED TODAY, AND OTHERS THAT TIME DOES NOT PERMIT, WERE BORN FROM FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH AND STARTED WITH FEDERAL GRANT FUNDS FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE, THE BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE, AND SPECIFICALLY, PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS AND EDWARD BYRNE MEMORIAL JUSTICE ASSISTANCE GRANT FUNDS,

WHICH WERE RECENTLY ELIMINATED OR DRAMATICALLY REDUCED IN THE LAST FEDERAL BUDGET. I ASK YOU TODAY TO RESTORE THESE MUCH NEEDED FUNDS IN ORDER FOR EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS SUCH AS THESE TO CONTINUE TO DEVELOP AND ASSIST POLICE DEPARTMENTS IN FIGHTING CRIME AND IMPROVING OUR CITIZENS' QUALITY OF LIFE.

IN CLOSING, I SIT HERE TODAY SPEAKING FOR MY COMMUNITY AND MY CHILDREN, NEARLY 26,000 CHILDREN OF PROVIDENCE. I BELIEVE THAT ANY AMERICAN POLICE CHIEF WORTH HIS SALT WOULD TELL YOU THAT THE BEST WAY TO FIGHT CRIME IS TO INVEST IN OUR CHILDREN AND TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS. TOO MANY OF OUR CHILDREN IN OUR INNER CITIES ARE POOR AND ARE FRIGHTENED OF THE VIOLENCE AROUND THEM. THEY HAVE COME TO KNOW THE FACE OF VIOLENCE ALL TOO INTIMATELY, ALL TOO PERSONALLY. THESE ARE OUR CHILDREN. THEY ARE AMERICAN CHILDREN. I BELIEVE OUR NATION MUST NOT JUST PROTECT OUR CHILDREN AT THE BORDERS FROM THE THREAT OF FOREIGN ATTACKS, BUT ALSO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES WHERE WE LIVE.

WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, TODAY'S POLICE DEPARTMENTS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF OUR CITIZENS OF OUR RESPECTIVE COMMUNITIES. GOOD POLICING THAT IS WELL DESIGNED AND WELL MANAGED SHOULD BE EMBRACED AND SUPPORTED. IT WILL SAVE LIVES, AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES. MR. CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS, I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY HERE TODAY, AND I AM AVAILABLE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS. THANK YOU.