Aurora’s implementation of Recommendations from President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

Since becoming Aurora, Colorado’s Chief of Police in March 2015, Nicholas Metz has identified and implemented a number of initiatives to enhance the relationship between the Aurora Police Department (APD) and the community. These model many of the recommendations set forth in the “Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing,” a copy of which has been provided to APD members ranking Lieutenant and above. The following are summaries of our agency’s biggest successes and challenges in executing the six pillars of the Task Force report.

Pillar 1: Building Trust and Legitimacy

The APD was reorganized in April 2015 to establish a culture of transparency and accountability, strive for a more diverse workforce, and improve workplace efficiency and operation. Highlights of that reorganization included: diversifying staff and promoting internal procedural fairness at the Executive ranks; appointing the first female Division Chief in the organization’s 108-year history; appointing a Latino male as District Commander for only the second time in APD history; and appointing the first African American Executive Officer to the Chief of Police.

To reaffirm a culture of accountability and promote legitimacy internally, the APD significantly changed the Internal Affairs Bureau, which is primarily responsible for investigating allegations of misconduct involving officers. The Bureau was relocated from Police Headquarters to a new off-site location with a separate entrance to its offices. The move improves access and service to the community. Two additional investigators have been assigned to the Bureau. The unit previously consisted of a Lieutenant, two Sergeants and an Administrative Technician; it now made up of a newly appointed Commander, a Lieutenant, two Sergeants, two Agents and an Administrative Technician. The staffing increase allows for all complaints to come into a central location for screening and investigative assignment, enabling a more consistent approach. Policy and procedures will continue to be reviewed to improve the quality and timeliness of investigations, and ensure appropriate strategies are applied and outcomes achieved to increase public trust. Previously, a Lieutenant oversaw operations, but with increased responsibilities and added staffing, a Commander will now fulfill that duty.

APD has worked with the community and City officials to establish a new Independent Review Board (IRB). Appointed by the Aurora City Council, citizens on the board serve alongside police officers and review police actions in controversial incidents. Board members also assist the Chief of Police—in a deliberative process—in recommending discipline in instances of sustained misconduct by subject members. Citizens must complete an application and screening to be appointed. Once the council nominates and confirms IRB members, the new members undergo training prior to serving a three-year term as part of a 20-person pool.

APD has established a recruiting strategies committee that includes internal members and private-sector business partners working together to develop departmental police recruiting strategies and approaches. This committee will make recommendations to the Chief of Police,
seeking not only to enhance the overall quality and quantity of applicants, but also to improve the diversification among applicants and build an organization that more closely mirrors Aurora’s multi-cultural community.

APD command officers regularly attend meetings and events to educate and serve as resources for community groups seeking equality. Partnering organizations include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Urban League and Rights for All People. The City of Aurora also hosts the Key Community Response Team (KCRT), a group of community leaders and activists who meet monthly to share information and address matters of concern involving the City’s public safety departments. The APD works closely with various leaders to create additional community councils to lead in resolving issues that impact the perception of law enforcement, both nationally and locally.

**Pillar 2: Policy and Oversight**

The APD created a new Compliance and Professional Standards Division to research, review, amend and develop the organization’s policies and procedures. Within this division, a newly appointed Division Chief will review the department's use of force policies to ensure that the APD is following best practices when it comes to use of force training, as well as reporting, investigating, reviewing and tracking of officer use of force incidents. This Division Chief also oversees the agency’s training unit and employment background investigators.

**Pillar 3: Technology and Social Media**

The APD maintains a website to share information and make services accessible to the public. This site delineates how to file a commendation or complaint concerning a police officer, join the agency, participate in citizen academies, or volunteer. It also enables community members to file some reports online. We use social media as a means to interact with citizens and maintain accounts with Facebook, Twitter and Nextdoor.com. For Twitter, there are two accounts—one in English and the second in Spanish.

The APD established a department-wide Body Worn Camera Program funded in the 2015 and 2016 budgets adopted by the City Council. Funding is sufficient to outfit uniformed personnel, as well as some tactical units, with cameras. The funding also provides for additional staff to process video data and to increase data storage capabilities.

**Pillar 4: Community Policing and Crime Reduction**

Uniformed officers of all ranks within the APD are encouraged to engage in positive interactions with community members. Policing is expected to occur outside the patrol vehicle, not solely from within it. Officers of all ranks attend community forums or services involving communities of faith. Participating members proudly wear their uniform on such occasions to lessen the apprehension it causes for some, and show that the uniform also represents positive community interaction. If event hosts make known concerns that the wearing of uniforms may be disruptive, and if hosts can't be dissuaded, APD members will attend in plain clothes.
The APD’s nationally recognized Volunteers in Policing Program has existed for over 43 years and includes citizens of all ages. In 2014, 488 volunteers donated 33,685 hours, which saved the City $759,597. (The stats for 2015 are currently being compiled.) The program includes: Victim Services, which provide emotional support and intervention for crime victims; Chaplains, which provide counseling and support for officers and the community; Interpreters, which provide translation and interpretation services to assist officers in serving the city’s broad and diverse communities; Explorers, which provide young people interested in law enforcement the opportunity to be mentored by officers, receive training and perform community service; and Citizen & Teen Police Academies, which provide adults and teens condensed versions of training in police services. Participants are then expected to provide support for non-enforcement police activities and serve at special community events. The APD sponsors other programs for youth ranging in age from 5 to 18 years. These include providing educational programming and an array of prevention and intervention services that build youth resiliency to drugs, gangs and violence. The partnership with our citizen volunteers has both expanded and enhanced the police services provided to our community, and is integral to APD’s operations.

**Pillar 5: Training and Education**

The Department is evaluating and revising officer training, with a renewed focus on training in de-escalation techniques and use of less lethal devices as part of entry-level academies and annual in-service sessions. We also will bring procedural justice training, sponsored by the Department of Justice’s Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office, to our agency.

**Pillar 6: Officer Wellness and Safety**

The APD uses a Personnel Early Intervention System, a time-sensitive system designed to monitor risk indicators and promptly identify certain performance and/or stress-related issues with the goal to facilitate any necessary or appropriate follow-up activities by supervisors for their employees. Alerts for early intervention are emailed directly to supervisors when indicators are triggered within the system. This is not a discipline system; rather, it is a system to help the APD identify members who may need assistance. Supervisors are responsible for initiating the review process for any activities by the employee that produce alerts. The review, counseling of the employee, any recommendation(s) for assistance, and notification up the employee’s chain of command are required.

The APD also has in place a Peer Support Program through which members are trained to provide support to fellow officers experiencing a personal or professional crisis. The Department contracts with a service provider specializing in police psychology, crisis intervention, trauma recovery and violence prevention. APD members are permitted to self-refer, or referrals can be initiated by the employee’s supervisor.

*For additional information, contact Lieutenant Marcus Dudley, Jr., Executive Officer to the Chief of Police, Aurora Police Department, at 303-739-6256 or mdudley@auroragov.org.*