

Expert panel says current emphasis on physical tactics, firearms instruction neglects critical communication, de-escalation skills

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Most police training in the United States is misfocused, too short, uses ineffective teaching methods, and is out of alignment with both community safety priorities and research about what works to minimize bias and use of force, the [Council on Criminal Justice Task Force on Policing](#) said today in a [set of new reports](#).

The Task Force of 11 law enforcement, civil rights and community leaders called on the federal government to adopt national training and certification standards to ensure that all police officers, regardless of the size or location of their agency, receive a strong foundation in the full range of skills and concepts necessary to provide just and effective public safety services.

The findings and recommendations are part of a [package of policy assessments](#) examining the most recent and rigorous research on academy and in-service police training in the U.S., including instruction on de-escalation tactics, implicit bias, and procedural justice. While studies show that [de-escalation training](#) can significantly reduce use-of-force incidents, and [procedural justice training](#) can improve public perceptions of police, there is no evidence thus far that [implicit bias training](#) – offered by a growing number of police agencies – diminishes racial disparities in policing, the Task Force found.

“Training is a critical piece of ongoing efforts to reduce the use of excessive force by police officers, but too often, decisions about whether and when to invest in certain types of training are guided by the latest trends, rather than evidence,” said Task Force Executive Director Nancy La Vigne. “To substantially reduce police violence and improve law enforcement’s relationship with communities, it’s crucial that policymakers use research to shape their decisions about the investment of scarce training dollars.”

Other highlights of the Task Force findings include:

- Police officers in the U.S. receive an average of six months of training, far less than what comparable democracies require. While standards vary widely among states,

American police training requirements are typically [on par with](#) those for professions involving little human interaction, such as pest control and water well drilling.

- Police training’s heavy emphasis on physical and technical skills, such as the use of firearms, [shortchanges instruction on communication and critical thinking skills](#), de-escalation tactics, principles of procedural justice, and the handling of scenarios that officers most commonly encounter.
- Many police academies use a “stress-oriented” military approach that involves intensive physical demands and psychological pressure. But [research favors a “resiliency-based” curriculum](#) that teaches officers to recognize stress and control their responses to it.
- In addition to [establishing national standards](#) for police training and certification, Congress should create incentives for state and local agencies to comply with such benchmarks. Training on critical elements such as constitutional policing and de-escalation should be consistent nationwide, but jurisdictions should retain some discretion to configure training in accordance with their needs and resources.
- Officers should be subjected to periodic recertification that includes not just firearms training, but also de-escalation tactics, communications strategies, and principles of procedural justice, which promote more respectful encounters between officers and community members.

“Several strategies can improve the effectiveness of training, but training alone isn’t sufficient to promote lawful, respectful, and equitable policing practices,” the Task Force concluded. “Police departments need policies and standards that hold officers accountable – and leaders committed to changing the internal culture of their departments.”

The training evaluations are the second package released by the Task Force, which issued recommendations on [chokehold bans](#), [duty-to-intervene policies](#) and [no-knock warrants](#) in January. Established in November 2020 by the nonpartisan [Council on Criminal Justice](#), the panel is evaluating the most commonly proposed police reforms focused on preventing police use of excessive force, reducing racial biases, increasing police accountability, and improving the relationship between law enforcement agencies and communities. For each measure, the Task Force produces an assessment weighing the proposal’s relative value based on the best available research and the expertise and experience of members.

Task Force [members](#) represent a broadly diverse range of perspectives and experience, and include law enforcement leaders, civil rights advocates, researchers, a former big-city mayor, and community members who have lost loved ones to police violence. The [Crime Lab](#) at the

University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy is serving as research partner for the Task Force, evaluating the empirical evidence that guides its recommendations.

The Task Force members are:

- Art Acevedo, Chief, Houston Police Department; President, Major Cities Chiefs Association
- Roy L. Austin, Jr., Partner, Harris, Wiltshire & Grannis, LLP; former White House domestic policy adviser
- Louis M. Dekmar, Chief, LaGrange (Ga.) Police Department; former President, International Association of Chiefs of Police
- Collette Flanagan, Founder, Mothers Against Police Brutality
- Walter Katz, Vice President of Criminal Justice, Arnold Ventures; former police oversight official, Los Angeles County and San Jose, Calif.
- Cynthia Lum, Professor, George Mason University, Department of Criminology, Law and Society; Director, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy
- Tashante McCoy, Regional Manager and Founder, Crime Survivors for Safety & Justice/The OWL Movement
- DeRay Mckesson, Educator, Author and Co-Founder, Campaign Zero
- Michael Nutter, Former Mayor, City of Philadelphia; former President, U.S. Conference of Mayors
- Sean Smoot, Director and Chief Counsel, Police Benevolent and Protective Association of Illinois
- Rosie Rivera, Sheriff, Salt Lake County, Utah

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The Council is a nonpartisan membership organization and think tank created to advance understanding of the criminal justice policy challenges facing the nation and builds consensus for solutions based on facts, evidence, and fundamental principles of justice.

For more information on the Council and the Task Force, visit <https://counciloncj.org/>