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April 30, 2020

**Re: Respect for Law Enforcement Working Group of the
Presidential Commission for Law Enforcement and the
Administration of Justice**

Dear Commissioners,

Respect for law enforcement is of utmost importance to those of us who have dedicated our lives to upholding public safety in this country. Our decades of experience have taught us that earning respect can only be accomplished by giving respect, rather than by instilling fear through over-policing.

In addition to the toll on officer morale and mental health that community distrust can take, when the police are feared by those they are sworn to protect, public safety suffers. We simply cannot do our jobs when crimes go unreported, and when witnesses refuse to talk to us.

The reason communities do not collaborate with law enforcement is not because of any laxness in enforcing the law, but because police are called upon to address problems with which we should never have been tasked and which we are ill-suited to solve. Addiction, poverty, and unaddressed mental health issues are the drivers of most arrests in the United States, but police are not equipped to address these root issues.

People lose trust in the police when our justice system is not effective. We can incapacitate someone, at great expense to the taxpayer, in prison or jail for a time, but eventually almost everyone returns to their communities. When they do, most are worse off than they were before they came in contact with law enforcement. Broken family and social support systems, lessened job opportunities, and an intensive immersion into criminal society keep recidivism rates unacceptably high.

There are, however, many programs that break the cycle, reduce reoffending, and build trust by addressing the root issues that cause crime. Programs like Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, which connects people committing low-level drug-related offenses to treatment and support

services rather than arresting them, have been shown to [lower recidivism by 58%](#).

Community members will always be our best source of information – not only about the details of a crime, but of its context and possible repercussions. When communities see officers as guardians to be approached for help, rather than as enforcers to be feared, we improve our effectiveness better than any surveillance system ever could.

And there's a further advantage of not over-policing our communities: When we focus on the real threats to public safety, we can actually focus on them. Every time police arrest someone who poses little threat to public safety, it takes police officers, prosecutors, and judges away from the cases where we're really needed and fills our jails with people who do not need to be there.

If we stopped clogging the system with unnecessary arrests, we would have more time to gather evidence, allowing us to solve more serious crimes and focus on the high-risk, repeat offenders who truly threaten our way of life.

In short, we need to ask ourselves: What is the purpose of the criminal justice system?

We the undersigned believe the purpose of the justice system is to keep communities safe. To do that, we need to allow police to be police, focusing on the biggest risks to society and preventing future crime from occurring. When police are asked to make arrests in response to social problems better addressed by housing services, drug treatment and prevention programs, mental health professionals, and social workers, it is not only ineffective. It undermines this grand profession to which we dedicated our lives.

Respectfully,



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