

Justice

Police and Community Relations

J-2

The Friends Committee on Legislation supports laws that build trust and confidence between law enforcement personnel (“police”) and the communities they serve.

Crime prevention efforts must begin with the creation of healthy neighborhoods and good community relationships. Effective crime prevention is enhanced when the police are part of the local community. The police can best become effective agents of crime reduction by putting themselves in a relationship of interdependency with the community. It is important for a police department to reflect the ethnic composition of the communities being served. A special emphasis in our legislative efforts is to help bridge the present gap in understanding and reduce conflicts between police and other segments of our communities that are based on age, race, disabilities, gender, sexual preference, etc. Racial profiling must cease at all levels. Communities should not become war zones with police maintaining primarily the security of those with wealth or power. Problem solving by police should emphasize developing understanding and peaceful relationships among people rather than methods based on authority and force. Such methods tend to perpetuate anger, distance, mistrust, and conflict.

At a larger level, any crime prevention program must involve a range of government and private agencies in addressing the societal problems of alienation, poverty, and discrimination. Improvement in these conditions would improve police-community relations.

Police Training and Working Conditions

We support statutory delineation of the powers and responsibilities of the police as well as programs for the careful selection, training, and supervision of police personnel.

We support adequate salaries and healthy working conditions for all police personnel. Because of the immense stress level in law enforcement it is also important that there be an on-going assessment of the emotional status of police personnel, coupled with the availability of a vigorous counseling program, support services, and other benefits to meet individual needs. Because of their lack of training in civilian techniques, military personnel should not be used for police work, such as crowd control.

Police Conduct

The public needs to be assured that if members of a police agency engage in misconduct such as taking bribes, fabricating evidence and giving false testimony, or mistreating people who are in custody, the offenders will be quickly exposed and disciplined, and all relevant injustices will be righted. Where oppressive police cultures exist, various methods must be available to citizens to bring about changes, including

local civilian police review panels with community-wide representation, grand jury investigations, court proceedings, internal police review procedures, and support for both internal and external “whistle blowers”. Police who remain silent when they see other officers break the law should be held accountable for their lack of response. FCL opposes use of any kind of entrapment by police, including lying during interrogation.

When death results from police action committed with criminal intent, it is clear to us that police officers found guilty by the judicial system should be held to the same legal standards and penalties applied to private citizens convicted of unjustifiable homicide. In addition, police officers who are guilty of such an offence should be removed from law enforcement. Police who commit homicide from errors of judgment should, at the minimum, be evaluated for suspension, reassignment, counseling, retraining, or removal from the police department.

Enforcement guidelines

Police who carry guns acquire the potential to act as judge, jury and executioner. Even dangerous criminals have the right to be tried in court for their offenses. Unfortunately, mistakes have been made; innocent people and non-dangerous criminals have been injured and killed as a result of police action. For these reasons, we advocate that police use the least force necessary, emphasizing the use of non-lethal weapons and nonviolent methods of handling disputes and subduing dangerous persons. Any public employee who is authorized to carry firearms should be required to have adequate training and certification that ensures they do not have an inclination to abuse power.

