

Diversifying the Police Force: Sworn and Non Sworn

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Over the decades reformation of the police has become further apparent to be a necessity. Police are human beings and like every other human they make mistakes. However, it has become apparent that these smaller mistakes and complacency on old ways have driven a wedge between the police and the communities in which they serve. Further complicating the relationship between communities impacting both trust and faith within the ‘protectors’ of many communities. Kathleen O'Toole, the first female commissioner of the Boston Police Department, as well as an American police officer highlighted these challenges in a novel titled, *7 Ways to Fix Policing NOW*. O'Toole highlights the challenges due to controversies and a clear disconnection of trust and a strong relationship with police departments and their respective communities. Within stating these impacts she highlights the seven ways in which we can fix policing to be an entity of high regard and trust within communities. Out of the seven ways listed the most impactful was recruiting a diverse police force.

As of 2025, where DEI (Diversity Equity and Inclusion) programs are being cut increasingly it is becoming clear that diversification of police agencies is paramount. Kathleen O'Toole in Chapter 4 of her novel discusses the benefits police departments would have if they were to diversify those working in their departments. In order to be effective, a police force should understand the diverse populations they are serving. As well as focusing on learning how to communicate effectively with the members of the community. Mrs. O'Toole sheds light on the fact that not only is there a need to diversify the gender, race, and religion of those working in the police force but also hire both sworn and non sworn officers. Mentioning this type of conversation leads to a very controversial debate among many. However, a few departments have begun to take this approach and have seen a great relationship with their communities and a stronger trust.

When the policing agency that is serving the community looks like those they serve, it in return facilitates a sense of not only community but trust. This phenomenon has been occurring for years and is part of human psychology. Naturally, humans tend to trust and gravitate towards people that look like them. It is something called the ‘similar to me effect’ and it is a cognitive bias in the human brain that leads people to trust and like people that are similar to them. This applies to policing significantly. According to research at *Pennsylvania State University*, “it appears that subordinates tend to be more trusting and confident in supervisors when they perceive themselves as similar to themselves than those perceived as dissimilar.” (Freeman, 2025). Due to this psychological thinking, when we look like others we tend to have a more positive relationship with said people. The same applies for police when the department looks like a reflection of the community.

Houston, Texas is what is called, a ‘blended’ police department of both sworn and unsworn individuals working within the department. The department was interviewed on navigating the challenges of having this type of department as well as the benefits. Interviewing both sworn and non sworn, similar answers were presented of the benefits stating that the outside perspective helped them. A non sworn worker stated that their job working as a civilian with the department has led to a great understanding of all that police go through and has created a stronger sense of respect. “I have come to see policing from a different perspective and have the utmost respect for all they do to ensure we’re staying safe.” (Dasher, 2024). This type of connection can really play aid in eliminating the us vs. them mentality of both police as well as the community. As a civilian being able to work in the department alongside police officers can really allow for a greater sense of understanding and lead to a stronger sense of community among police officers and the area they serve. Similarly, when officers work with civilians of the

community they can develop a sense of wanting to protect their needs as well. Facilitating a greater sense of connection between police officers and non sworn. “Close contact and the desire of sworn officers’ to protect others can create a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect between sworn and non-sworn personnel.” (Dasher, 2024). Highlighting Kathleen O’Toole suggestion of urging police departments to further diversify their departments to both sworn and non sworn workers. This rather simple step can ultimately positively help the bond between the community and their department.

While this fix of diversifying departments' work force to better improve police community relations may seem like a rather easy fix, it is not. The issue many departments are seeing at the current moment is a lack of qualified applicants. There generally has been a lack of those that want to become police officers as well. Following years of eroding trust, the Ferguson effect, as well as George Floyd effect the stakes of being a police officer are high. Public ridicule, lack of communication, trust, faith, and transparency have all led to a general sense of betrayal and distrust of the police by many communities. This has led to a decrease in applicants over the years. “A 2019 survey from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) found that 78% of agencies surveyed were struggling to recruit enough officers.” (Hegazy, 2025). Further concluding that a sample within this survey indicated that staffing in large cities saw almost an 80% decrease from 2019 to 2024. (Hegazy, 2025). Due to this it has been incredibly difficult for those that want to work within a police department. This decrease in staff due to stigma and conflict over the years will greatly impact the ability to implement this fix.

Another problem regarding hiring both sworn and non sworn officers is the potentiality of conflict of views. It is no secret that police have been trained in a militarization manner for a long period of time. Over the years the police culture of training has taken shape of being an

incredibly strict and military-like organization. This in a variety of ways has impacted the policing mindset both the positive guardian and negative warrior mindset seen within policing. Therefore, introducing a non sworn civilian to the police force will offer its challenges as well as benefits. One of the major challenges being differences in training. “conflict can arise in part from training differences between the two groups, even when off duty sworn officers are used to complement full-time non-sworn employees” (Dasher, 2024). Due to this difference in training leads overall to a difference in which each role is authorized to do. This could offer potential conflict between employees regarding the approach they believe is correct for certain situations within the department. However while this may cause an issue, it offers its benefits. Having both sworn and non sworn will offer a greater set of opinions and views. While this could be problematic it could also pave the way for more informed viewpoints and diverse understandings leading to better relationships with the public.

Implementing not only a department that is diverse in gender, race, religion, skills, but also sworn and non sworn would significantly improve police community relations. It would not only open the doorway to a greater understanding of the outside community but also allow for a greater use of perspectives when handling issues with the communities. Employing sworn and non sworn officers would ultimately offer a greater chance to bridge the gap between the community and police. Not only through a civilian viewpoint within police matters but also by creating a department that is reflective of the community it serves. This fix presented by Kathleen O’Toole would ultimately lead to a greater connection between the police and community. Further building trust that is paramount to the success of a police department and the community they serve.

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