



TESTIMONY

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
EDUCATION AND THE ARTS
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE
INFRASTRUCTURE AND
TRANSPORTATION
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
LAW AND BUSINESS
NATIONAL SECURITY
POPULATION AND AGING
PUBLIC SAFETY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
TERRORISM AND
HOMELAND SECURITY

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis.

This electronic document was made available from www.rand.org as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

Skip all front matter: [Jump to Page 1](#) ▼

Support RAND

[Browse Reports & Bookstore](#)

[Make a charitable contribution](#)

For More Information

Visit RAND at www.rand.org

Explore [RAND Testimony](#)

View [document details](#)

Testimonies

RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies.

Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Unauthorized posting of RAND electronic documents to a non-RAND website is prohibited. RAND electronic documents are protected under copyright law. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please see [RAND Permissions](#).

Performance Metrics to Improve Police-Community Relations

Jessica Saunders

RAND Office of External Affairs

CT-423

February 2015

Testimony presented before a joint meeting of the California State Assembly and California State Senate Public Safety Committees on February 10, 2015

This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark.



Published 2015 by the RAND Corporation
1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138
1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050
4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2665
RAND URL: <http://www.rand.org/>
To order RAND documents or to obtain additional information, contact
Distribution Services: Telephone: (310) 451-7002;
Email: order@rand.org

Jessica Saunders¹
The RAND Corporation

*Performance Metrics to Improve Police-Community Relations*²

Before the Committees on Public Safety
California State Assembly and Senate

February 10, 2015

I. Introduction

Good morning. I am Jessica Saunders, a criminologist at RAND Corporation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization dedicated to providing research to policymakers to help them make informed decisions. I have worked with police departments for more than 15 years on a variety of issues, including strategies to improve police-community relations.

How a Data-Driven Approach Can Improve Police-Community Relations

Researchers and practitioners collect and analyze data for a variety of purposes: to understand what an organization is doing, to track its progress, to compare it with similar organizations, to conduct research, and to influence what the organization does and how it is perceived. If improving police-community relations is a priority for local governments, then there are three reasons why they should start requiring new data collection and analysis to measure relations:

- (1) **Performance metrics are one of the policy levers to influence actions.** Measuring police-community relations and incorporating these measures into the way law enforcement officers and departments are judged will change behavior. There should also be performance metrics that incentivize and demonstrate constitutional policing, meaning policing that is bias-free and that uses force only when necessary.
- (2) **Transparency enhances public satisfaction.** Police departments should make these measures and analyses publicly available in an effort to increase transparency, which is key for public trust. There may be push-back from many agencies on this point because transparency is a double-edged sword. It can be embarrassing when a department does

¹ The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of RAND or any of the sponsors of its research. This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

² This testimony is available for free download at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT423.html>.

not perform well, but it can also demonstrate when the department is successfully fulfilling its mission.

- (3) **Accountability reinforces the message.** Local governments and law enforcement should use these measures and analyze the data to hold individual officers and police departments accountable for their actions and behaviors. They should also be rewarded when they fulfill this mission. Accountability will reinforce the message that police-community relations are valued and important.

Research demonstrates that collecting and analyzing data can be an effective policy lever to improve police-community relations. A systematic change in the way police performance is measured could prevent the systemic issues that have led to civil rights violations and poor police-community relations by identifying potential problems early enough that corrective action can be taken.

II. Expect What You Inspect

There is an old adage—“**expect what you inspect.**” This means that if we want to shape behavior, an effective way to do so is to measure it. So, if local governments and the police are truly committed to improving police-community relations, these relations need to be routinely measured. The most effective way to do this is to create new metrics and integrate them into existing structures of performance measurement, at both the department and officer levels. Localities already currently use some data to measure and track how well the police are performing their mission in terms of crime rates, crime clearance, arrest rates, and response time.

Placing all the emphasis on crime levels creates a dangerous tension because it overlooks police officers’ other roles and functions. This is why, if local governments believe that improving police-community relationships is important, it is imperative to start measuring them. If crime is the only policing metric that is measured, it is understandable that individual officers’ primary consideration would be to take action to affect crime rates. An individual officer is usually judged and promoted based on his or her crime statistics—for example, number of crimes cleared. Though individual officer behavior is obviously shaped by many factors, if police-community relations are not measured and success in that area is not linked to officers’ career paths, then ensuring that these relations are a priority for all officers will be difficult or impossible. **To focus exclusively on one goal at the expense of the others is to invite poor performance on alternative goals.**

Collecting data, in and of itself, is key to changing this behavior. But the data also have to be analyzed properly, which is a task that many law enforcement agencies do not have the capacity to do on their own. Detecting patterns of inequity in policing and enforcement services is not a simple undertaking. To do it correctly requires a high level of methodological sophistication. Researchers in the field of policing have learned how to do this effectively in small research projects and have been developing ways to roll this out on a large scale.

The bottom line is that until local governments start holding law enforcement agencies accountable for police-community relations and for demonstrating constitutional policing, these outcomes will never be on par with crime control as priorities within the department.

III. Transparency is Key to Building Community Trust

In order for the public to fairly judge their local law enforcement, they need to be adequately informed about law enforcement's efforts. Conversely, it can arouse public suspicion when members of a community perceive that agencies are not being transparent with policing information.

Each law enforcement agency provides different data to the public. For example, with a quick Internet search, I can obtain a great deal of information about crime in my neighborhood in Los Angeles because the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) posts up-to-date crime data on an easy-to-use map application. Smaller departments do not generally have this capability, but many still provide some data to the public about crimes in their communities. However, this is not at all standard across the state or the country.

On the web, **I find very sparse information about public satisfaction with the police and constitutional policing, including use of force (and excessive force), biased policing, complaints against the police, misconduct, corruption charges, and holding law enforcement officers accountable for misconduct.** As a result, members of the public have no easy way to discern whether there is a problem in any of these areas or to understand how big any particular problem may be. Therefore, members of the public may base their opinions on news stories and their own anecdotal experience with law enforcement.

IV. Accountability Is Essential to Demonstrating Commitment to Community Standards

The goal of positive police-community relations and constitutional policing needs to become embedded in the police culture, and both departments and individuals need to be held accountable in order to create and sustain this change. These priorities, codified in the creation of performance metrics, must be reinforced at both the individual and agency level.

In rare cases, such as when agencies have been charged with unconstitutional police practices, these priorities and metrics may be placed under a consent decree. This arrangement involves appointing an external body to help reform the department and monitor its compliance with specific requirements, usually involving a partnership between local governmental bodies, researchers, and the departments themselves. Over the past twenty years, about twenty departments have entered into agreements to be monitored, usually under threat of civil rights lawsuits. The departments and police agencies vary widely, with two of the approximately 20 in California: Los Angeles and Oakland police departments. The importance of these consent decrees cannot be overstated. In fact, these **consent decrees have created a new set of practices for effective and constitutional policing** that could be used even outside of these arrangements.

The departments under such decrees have experienced transformation because the process requires demonstrating that they become an effective and constitutional police force. A study by the Kennedy School at Harvard found that LAPD significantly improved under the supervision of the consent decree.³ By 2009, the end of the consent decree period, public satisfaction with the department was up, with 83 percent of residents saying that the LAPD was doing a good or excellent job. The frequency of using serious force fell each year between 2004 and 2009. During that same period, the quantity and quality of enforcement activity rose substantially.

Historically, law enforcement agencies have tended to agree to this type of intensive monitoring only after a civil rights problem has arisen. But a less reactive approach might help to ensure that such problems as excessive use of force or unconstitutional practices never rise to the level that a consent decree is necessary. Since each department that has undergone the process has emerged vastly improved, legislators might reasonably ask **whether there is a way to achieve**

³ Christopher Stone, Todd Foglesong, and Christine M. Cole, *Policing Los Angeles Under a Consent Decree: The Dynamics of Change at the LAPD*, Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, Harvard Kennedy School, May 2009. As of February 18, 2015: <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/criminaljustice/research-publications/measuring-the-performance-of-criminal-justice-systems/policing-los-angeles-under-a-consent-decree>

the same result without being subjected to a consent decree. The answer is yes, and it could be done for a fraction of the price. Requiring oversight could improve performance and prevent a serious problem from developing. Such oversight could become a common practice; through partnerships among local governments, police, and researchers, the stakeholders could develop standardized core performance metrics to be collected, analyzed, and disseminated by an external organization.

V. Recommendations on Performance Measures

I recommend that California take the national lead in recommending that local governments mandate that local law enforcement agencies report performance metrics that include police-community relations (police satisfaction, trust in the police, police legitimacy) **and constitutional policing practices** (bias-free policing, use of appropriate force) **to publicly demonstrate that the agencies are meeting these requirements for all the communities they serve.** This system could prevent the necessity of a federal consent decree because problems at the department and the officer level could be identified early and corrected.

The new data collection efforts should include community surveys so that police can gauge public satisfaction with their service from all community members. This would include not just people who call the police for service because they have been victimized or are witnesses to a crime but also people who never interact with the police and who have had involuntary contact with the police, such as during traffic stops, arrests, or questioning as a witness or suspect. While surveys can be costly because they require rigorous methods, an upcoming soon-to-be-published U.S. Department of Justice study has demonstrated that they can be done relatively inexpensively.

Additional data should also be collected and analyzed to look for effective and constitutional policing—for example, looking for the absence of bias in stops, searches, and arrests and for equity in the application of use of police force. These data are not already being reported to the state, but some have already been collected at the local level, especially in large departments. **Some additional data collection will likely be required, placing additional burden on local police departments.** I believe the payoff in the demonstration of transparency and accountability as well as positive community relations will far outweigh the costs of additional data collection and analysis.

This would be a logistically challenging change because there are close to 1,000 law enforcement agencies operating in California, and the types of performance measurements, data, and analysis may need to be tailored for some communities. The new data collection effort and additional

analysis will require resources as well as substantial expertise that most departments do not have in house. One way to guarantee such expertise is by involving outside research partners. For full disclosure, while RAND could be one such potential partner, let me be clear that there are a number of other possible credible research entities from which to choose—and involving an outside organization could have benefits in making the findings more credible to public audiences. And if research partners worked with multiple departments, it would reduce the overall cost burden because the marginal cost of assisting an additional department would be reduced. This analysis should be made publicly available so community members can see how their police are doing and hold them accountable for making changes when necessary.

One of the most difficult problems faced by police and city and local managers in the short run will be the awkward period of transition to such a new strategy. The new measurement systems will not be widely understood or accepted immediately. Therefore, I would recommend starting with a few pilot projects to develop these new metrics in key law enforcement agencies and working with researchers to identify cost-effective methods of collecting new data. By experimenting and finding what works best, and by demonstrating success early on, it could greatly enhance acceptance in the long run.

In conclusion, local governments should assess the police on more than crime statistics, and police departments and officers should be held publicly accountable for meeting the community's expectations. Adding new dimensions of performance metrics, such as public satisfaction and constitutional practices, would go a long way, especially if the dimensions are being assessed by an external research partner or oversight body. These new measures can also help identify problems before they get to a point where the federal government needs to intervene to ensure quality police services. This would make California a national leader in ensuring that state and local departments maintain effective and constitutional policing practices.

Thank you for your time and attention.