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UNYCOBA Scholarship Essay

Increasing the Bond Between Law Enforcers and the Community

In the midst of seemingly endless tragedies, Buffalo is grappling with fear, resentment, and hostility towards those that attempt to disrupt the strong collectivity we've cultivated in our community. From the COVID-19 pandemic to the recent mass shooting, people in the Buffalo community, including law enforcement, are desperately seeking solutions to restore the neighborly bond we all pride ourselves on. The Buffalo community prides itself on its kindness and neighborly collectivity that has long built a strong sense of unity. However, this newest decade has brought about unrest throughout the nation. This civil unrest is surely felt throughout the Buffalo community as well. Responses to tragedies nearly always urge a call for change, but most recently, these calls for change are ones that have been directed towards law enforcement. The suggestions for change, and the resentment felt towards law enforcement, entirely disregards their essential role in this community. Moreover, law enforcement as an industry is struggling to hire and retain officers, as a result of public opinions and damaged bonds between law enforcement and the community. Law enforcement is an essential facet of community, yet it is not effectively acknowledged nor perceived as such. Law enforcement serves to protect the community and facilitate both safety and collectivity. These are just two of the attributes of a strong community that are embodied in law enforcement. In order to facilitate a strong sense of unity in our community, both law enforcers and the people of the community itself must collaborate to strengthen the bond that is so desperately needed in our neighborhoods.

A strong, unified community must be built on both trust and transparency. We, as a community, are constantly evolving in pursuit of improvements and prosperity, and in order to achieve that collectively, both citizens and law enforcers must establish and maintain transparency about the challenges faced in our society. Because trust is a reciprocal relationship, it is essential for both citizens and law enforcers to both acknowledge and participate in resolving the challenges or issues emerging in our neighborhoods. While transparency of *all* information is not always a reality, law enforcers can notify citizens of the general challenges they're facing in the community. The transparency created, on behalf of law enforcers, will effectively urge citizens to participate in resolving the issues that are affecting both law enforcers and citizens. Additionally, hosting community meetings will provide the space necessary for discussions surrounding finding positive solutions. In my experiences, attending town hall meetings, hosted by local officials, provided the opportunity to learn more about the community I live in and motivated me to engage more within this space. I learned so much about the successes and challenges that my community was facing at the time, and it was so inspiring to see my impassioned peers share their thoughts and ideas regarding solutions. Events such as town hall meetings consistently build a stronger sense of unity in our neighborhoods, and adopting this practice for citizens and law enforcers will likely strengthen the relationship between law enforcers and the community. Additionally, transparency from law enforcers will likely foster a stronger sense of trust from citizens and encourage them to participate in addressing these challenges as well. For example, North Buffalo's neighborhood

block clubs and Neighborhood Watch cultivate more accountability and engagement within our community, and it connects citizens to law enforcement in positive ways. Extending this practice and motivating citizens to participate throughout the Buffalo community will facilitate a stronger sense of unity and safety throughout our neighborhoods.

Building a sense of trust and unity within our community must begin from young ages. Introducing law enforcers to children at schools creates a positive space for youth to interact and build trust with law enforcement. By creating these relationships from such young ages, children will likely develop a positive attitude towards law enforcement that will increase the comfort felt by relying on law enforcers. In my youth, I had more interactions with law enforcers than the general adolescent, because my father works in law enforcement. My relationship with my father instilled a sense of admiration for the profession and the courage needed to work in this field. Moreover, I did not feel fearful when seeing other law enforcers. Additionally, I can recall visits from law enforcers in elementary school in which they shared information regarding our safety. School visits from law enforcers will provide an effective opportunity for youth to learn about law enforcement, safety, and services. Engaging youth in positive manners will facilitate a strong memory that will extend into adolescence. For middle and high schools, adolescents would likely benefit from a resource officer permanently stationed within their school. Having a stationed law enforcer within a school building provides an added sense of security for the school community as a whole. Moreover, a school resource officer provides the opportunity for adolescents to interact with and build relationships with law enforcement, in general. In my experiences, my high school had a stationed law enforcement officer that was a great resource to the entire school community. Officer H.'s presence in our school assisted in building trust with adolescents that extended outside of the school community; moreover, seeing Officer H. in the community was comforting. Many of my peers regarded Officer H. as both a mentor and guidance counselor too, and this positive and consistent presence in my school community fosters a stronger relationship between law enforcement and adolescents.

Cultivating positive experiences often begins with positive interpersonal interactions. Unfortunately for many citizens, their interactions with law enforcers tend to result in negative consequences, most often for traffic violations. Because of so many negative connotations surrounding law enforcement vehicles, law enforcers should patrol areas by walking. Through this practice, law enforcers become a physical presence in the community, one that can be seen and interacted with. It is much less intimidating to approach and ask for assistance from someone walking near you, rather than trying to get the attention of a driver. While I often see patrol vehicles driving nearby, I feel safer walking in the city when seeing a local officer walking the very same streets. Additionally, patrolling areas on foot provides the perfect opportunity for citizens to personally get to know their neighborhood officers. The personal relationships, cultivated through positive interpersonal interactions, will positively affect the likelihood of citizens trusting law enforcement consistently. Law enforcers will also have the opportunity to make connections with citizens throughout the community through this practice.

The continuation of community involvement from law enforcers is an essential practice that needs to be both consistently continued and more widely acknowledged. Both participating in community involvement and hosting community events are benevolent efforts that continue to strengthen the bond within our community. Citizens of the community should explicitly invite law enforcers to participate in events, and conversely, law enforcers should host community events

that invite citizens to enjoy positive experience and interactions with the community. Hosting community events, such as movie nights for youth in low income neighborhoods, facilitate positive experiences in the community that encourage more trust between citizens and law enforcers. Moreover, an event such as this provides a safe and exciting environment that may not be possible without organization from law enforcement. One of my most memorable interactions with law enforcement was through the Polar Plunge fundraiser that is hosted annually. UNYCOBA established a strong presence for this event each year, and the ability to participate with officers that personally invested in improving the lives of people with special needs was unforgettable. Law enforcers, collectively involving themselves in important causes, also set a positive example for the rest of the community and demonstrate benevolent intentions towards citizens.

Collaboration between both citizens and law enforcers in our community is essential to attempt to resolve the challenges we're facing today. One method for resolving unrest and injustice in our community is through community programs that invite both law enforcers and citizens to attend events and seminars that discuss tools for de-escalation. As a result of the unrest felt throughout our nation, it is more imminent than ever to invest time and effort into finding alternative solutions for hostile situations. Tools for de-escalation are effective in many facets of life, and it can be applied to nearly any interpersonal interaction. Hosting events and seminars designed to educate citizens and law enforcement about positive methods for de-escalation will demonstrate the goals and desire to improve our neighborhoods to the community. Providing the opportunity for educating the community on tools that will foster a stronger sense of collectivity effectively assists in strengthening the bond between our neighbors.

Law enforcement is an essential facet of a community that has been a perpetual presence in our society for generations. Moreover, much of law enforcement's philosophy reflects that of community-wide goals, including unity, collectivity, and prosperity. Law enforcement's role in protecting and participating in the community is dependent on reciprocal trust and unity that can only be cultivated through consistent positive experiences. It is essential for both citizens and law enforcers to consistently put in effort to strengthen the bond between all of us in our community. Collectively addressing challenges, participating in events, and building relationships are the necessary practices to strengthen the bond within our community.