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Position Paper

Candidacy for Denver Police Chief

The Denver Police Department has made tremendous progress over the past several years in many areas of policing. Our department boasts an internationally recognized and fully accredited Crime Laboratory with advanced state-of-the-art technology; has built enormous capacity to process and analyze crime data; applied creativity and innovation to improve and strengthen communication and transparency within the community we serve and protect; and has a talented and dedicated workforce committed to serving the citizens of our City. Through my communication with colleagues throughout the United States, I know that the Denver Police Department has become a model for police departments around the country to emulate.

The importance and value of creating and maintaining trust and legitimacy between police and community cannot be overstated. As well, it is imperative to have a workforce that is responsive, innovative, and committed to progressive deliverance of services to our community. As Police Chief, I will strive to enhance both critical areas through proactive leadership, inclusive communication, accountability and transparency.

Community Engagement

Community Relations - Public trust of its police force is a crucial ingredient to building a strong, vibrant and lasting relationship with the community. To achieve and maintain trust and legitimacy, we as a police department must be accountable, transparent, and accessible and continually seek opportunities to develop community partnerships and encourage our members to have both short and long-term positive interactions with our citizens. Every member of the police department has an obligation to help fulfil this need. Building upon efforts and partnerships that currently exist, such as police officer/youth forums and neighborhood revitalization projects, as well as encouraging new strategies and methods, will be a focus of my administration.

Through my personal experience and professional career, I have had numerous opportunities to engage and partner with community members and organizations. One example is serving as a Mentor with the Denver Public Schools at Thomas Jefferson High School. The opportunity to spend one hour each week for an entire school year with a group of students was very impactful. In addition to making long-lasting connections with students, fellow mentors and Denver Public Schools staff members, I was able to change negative perceptions some had of police officers through personal interaction and creating a better understanding of why and how police officers perform their duties. In turn, I learned how negative perceptions can legitimately formulate toward police officers and why officers may at times misperceive actions and reactions by youth. As a result, several of the students I interacted with now aspire to be police officers.

Under my administration, I will seek opportunities to expand our community outreach capacity and effectiveness through utilization of technology, data research and analysis, voluntarism, and creating a rewards system for officers that forward and contribute to the mission of community relationship building.

Community Action- Under my administration, where and when it is conceivable and viable, we will collaborate with communities to identify and solve communal and societal problems that negatively affect quality of life and public safety. While a Data Driven approach is effective and has a place in the operational strategies of the Denver Police Department toward crime prevention, combining it with a dedicated community based approach can enhance those crime prevention efforts.

It is imperative that substantial populations of community members are actively engaged in problem-solving partnerships with our police department to effectively produce long-term and permanent results in crime reduction. The formation of Community Action Groups that consist of a cross-section of community membership (Schools, Faith-Based, Private Business, Public Entities) could spur meaningful interest and involvement in neighborhood watch-style approaches to crime prevention and reduction. Providing professional training and identifying sustainable leadership would be essential to this approach.

Under my administration, I will seek opportunities to build upon current cultural outreach efforts in our diverse communities. An example of current efforts is occurring in Southwest Denver, where police engagement of our Spanish-speaking community is helping to break down barriers and alleviate fear-based negative perceptions of local law enforcement. Our work with the faith-based community has opened the door and provided access to a community that can be difficult to reach, and messaging through Spanish-speaking media outlets has dramatically increased our communication ability to this segment of our community.

As a Board Member on the Denver Latino Commission, I know that there is a lot of work yet to be done in the Latino community as well as our other diverse communities. During my tenure on this Board, we conducted a two-year study on the State of the Latino Community in Denver. The primary take-away from the final report surrounding Public Safety was the fear of Government Agencies (Police and ICE). There was also reference made to lack of attention and resources in regards to Runaways, Juvenile Justice and Sex Crimes. Community Action Groups could assist in identifying needs within communities and facilitate resource allocation and problem solving.

Community Based Outreach Team- There is currently a severe Mental Health Crisis that exists in this country, and we have felt the impact in our city. Police officers and other first responders are being called upon daily to resolve crisis situations related to mental health conditions, and are at times faced with legal challenges associated with decisions to forcibly intervene. Additional training of first responders regarding legal issues and appropriate response techniques is needed.

My administration will continue to work with other city agencies and resource providers to build upon current approaches to mental health and homeless outreach to improve public safety.

Building Trust and Legitimacy- I would take a two pronged approach to address the issues of trust and Legitimacy. The first would be to build trust with the personnel Denver Police Department. Without the understanding and support of the work force no plan will succeed. Information is normally delivered from the top down. It is imperative that the information flow is delivered from the bottom up as well. I would achieve this through an employee council and regular interaction with the men and women of the police department.

I would seek input from the officers to help develop goals and strategies of the department. I would keep officers informed on current DPD issues and areas of concern. This would help build trust and legitimacy in our actions. I would foster an environment of open communication, accessibility, transparency and support.

The second prong to building trust and legitimacy would be in regards to the community. I would strive to keep the community informed on the activity of the Denver Police Department and when necessary an explanation of the actions taken. This is especially important after high profile controversial critical incidents.

Not all critical Incidents are viewed as justified or necessary by the community, however a better understanding the facts would help ease the tension of the community. I would continue with current transparency practices and strive to release as much information to the public as possible after a critical incident involving a Police Use of Force action, acknowledging that the information is preliminary and may change as details unfold. I would also release regular reports to the public on Use of Force.

Closing- the Denver Police Department has set a high standard for Law Enforcement in this country. I would build upon our success by employing a progressive community engagement strategy while maintaining the high level operational police services that we currently provide. I would continue to move our department in an upward trajectory.