

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/my-brothers-keeper/good-news-for-police>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The first status report issued by the My Brothers Keeper Task Force unveiled a host of challenges and recommendations aimed at increasing the capacity of and opportunities for boys and young men of color. A number of the recommendations directly impact the law enforcement community, specifically the police, and also establish a much-needed framework for additional support for police agencies. To date, police departments have not actively joined the conversation about this groundbreaking initiative. They must do so; this is an important opportunity.

As a former commander of the community affairs unit of a major police department, I recall spearheading many community forums in which community members freely voiced their concerns about police practices, but were unwilling to sustain any remedial dialogue with the police because of a profound lack of trust. I was frustrated by the lack of resources and support for sustaining programs aimed at building community trust, particularly because I was also viewing firsthand the damaging results of the mistrust in our communities, particularly among young African American and Hispanic males. The task forces report speaks to these challenges and therefore it is good news for the police.

The report cites the enormous challenges facing boys and youth of color seeking to advance their opportunities. Particularly disturbing are the large homicide and incarceration rates of African American males in the U.S. The reports wide-ranging recommendations include the institutionalization of community-oriented policing to ameliorate biased practices in the criminal justice system. Both directly and indirectly, the report and its recommendations present myriad concrete opportunities for police agencies, such as:

The work of President Obama's MBK Task Force creates an imperative for all police agencies to familiarize themselves with the MBK initiative, use the recommendations as opportunities to review practices and strategies, engage in dialogue with their respective communities, and ultimately reinvigorate community policing and problem-solving strategies. The police community needs to become an active partner in this effort and to join the conversation and implementation of recommendations raised through this initiative.

Charlane Brown-Wyands is an advisor and contributor to Vera's Police Connecting with Communities of Color project. She is a retired NYPD Deputy Inspector, former commander of the NYPD Youth Services Unit, and former captain of the NYPD Community Affairs Unit. Also an attorney and currently a professor of legal studies and criminal justice at Berkeley College, Brown-Wyands has extensive experience in patrol, investigations, training, and police-community relations.

Vera's [My Brothers Keeper](#) blog series provides insights from Vera staff and other experts on the recommendations President Obama's task force released in 2014, as part of [a progress report](#) on the My Brothers Keeper initiative. We invite your comments.

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