



John Sofis Scheft, Esq. & Law Enforcement Dimensions, LLC

RESOLVE & HOPE
Where We Are Now

Issued June 4, 2020 – May be copied and circulated without limitation

Having observed and supported the law enforcement profession for over twenty-five years, I wanted to reach out to you in the aftermath of George Floyd's death.¹

Watching a person die at the hands of the police is beyond devastating. For any professional in a helping field (cop, lawyer, doctor, teacher), it is deeply painful when colleagues — anywhere, anytime — violate core standards.

It is also upsetting to be blamed for bad behavior that you had nothing to do with, and which you know is the opposite of how you have tried to conduct yourself as a police officer.

It may strike you as monumentally unfair that one horrible incident overshadows a concerted, broad-based, and longstanding effort in contemporary law enforcement to exorcise the demons of racial and ethnic bias through diversity, training, and community partnerships.

And it may compound your pain to feel that you, as a police officer, are being singled out by other actors (politicians, academics, commentators) who carry as much, if not more, responsibility for some of the racial divide our country continues to experience.

You may be concerned about the future — beyond the protests of the moment — that you will face when encountering citizens feeling emboldened to challenge your authority. Maybe you wonder: Is the assumption of good faith — essential for me to do my job in routine and exigent circumstances — gone?

And what about the charged conversations and use of force situations that are an inevitable part of my job? Will the standard become so elastic and public expectations so elevated that I will have to look over my shoulder at every turn?

¹If you are interested in obtaining a factual reconstruction of the incident to better understand what happened, here is a link to a Washington Post feature.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/05/30/video-timeline-george-floyd-death/?arc404=true>

**7 Central Street, Suite 100
Arlington, Massachusetts 02476
Telephone: (781) 646-4377 Fax: (781) 646-1776**

www.ledimensions.com

These feelings and concerns are legitimate and understandable. Don't diminish them. Don't wish or joke them away (as cops sometimes do!).

At the same time, please do not to use this sad, somewhat dangerous, somewhat unfair time as a reason to embrace cynicism and withdraw from your community.

It may be hard to see today, but there are reasons to be hopeful.

- **Acknowledging wrongdoing.** Even ardent critics of the police have been struck by the quick and forthright condemnation — on a national scale — by law enforcement professionals in response to George Floyd's death. The unqualified apology by law enforcement leaders and rank-and-file officers has been, and will be, the most important element of healing and moving forward. While our internet culture features outposts of derision, the vast, vast majority of citizens have been moved by police displays of empathy — taking a knee, removing a helmet, walking with protesters.
- **A resilient and responsive profession.** As much as any other profession, policing has been willing to assess, research, and modify its functions when faced with changing social conditions and public needs. Even a partial list speaks to sincere reform efforts undertaken in the past decade — community policing; problem solving; compstat; enhanced training in de-escalation and bias-free policing; collaboration with social and mental health providers; non-criminal responses to minor drug and behavior misdemeanors; expanded presence in schools — and the list goes on. This is not to say that every program is perfect, or that the motives behind each are always pure. But no one, in a state of sober reflection, can say that today's police are not trying.
- **A diverse profession.** Police officers are increasingly diverse — in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, culture, nationality, language skills, academic accomplishment, and in a host of other ways. This has made policing more responsive to typically underserved communities, and more aware of and committed to reversing the legacy of racism and prejudice that infects all institutions in our society.

George Floyd's death tragically reminds us of the significant work to be done, and that we cannot defensively say we've tried and let the conversation stop there. At the same time, take comfort in the knowledge that police agencies have been going in the right direction for a long time, and they should resolve to continue.

- **Empathy and understanding go both ways.** Please continue, as you have done so far, to listen to your communities and take in the angry, sad, urgent voices that flow your way. And please take any opportunity to educate your communities about the different roles and responsibilities that confront police officers, so that they can benefit from a more well-rounded understanding of what you do. Citizen police academies and other formal and informal efforts to help people understand the police are as critical as your openness to community input and dialogue.

In 1829, Sir Robert Peele wrote an enduring principle about how successful law enforcement had to function in a constitutional democracy: “[T]he police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.”

In the coming months there will be legislative and judicial efforts, and there will be internal soul searching by police practitioners and citizens, to further reform law enforcement in America. Stay open to all voices in this dialogue, including your own.

We will get through this, and policing will improve. My hope comes from my deep and abiding respect and love for your profession.

Stay well,

John Sofis Scheft