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Policing and Mental Health Experts Meet to Develop Prevention Model for Mental Health-Related Gun Violence

Police Foundation convenes practitioners, policy makers, and researchers for systematic review of existing research and best practices focused on risk assessment and intervention

WASHINGTON, DC—In the wake of the unspeakable tragedy in Newtown, CT, last month, and amid the complex ongoing political debate about the role of firearms in incidents of mass violence in America, the Washington, DC-based Police Foundation yesterday convened a distinguished group of experts from the law enforcement, science, mental health, and policy arenas to focus on mental health-related gun violence. Drawing upon a multidisciplinary body of knowledge, which establishes the extreme difficulty in predicting a violent act, the expert group distilled existing research into a framework that combines prevention and intervention strategies to give communities and the police a path to *preventing* mental health-related shootings rather than simply responding to the scene of yet another tragedy.

The group assembled the first iteration of a *Community Crisis Early Intervention System* to help avert future tragedies and to get those suffering with mental illness the help they need. By developing a systemic approach that weaves this knowledge together in a straightforward, practical manner, the group hopes to provide the police and the communities they serve with practical, no-to-low cost recommendations that can be quickly implemented.

Describing the impetus for the meeting, Police Foundation President Jim Bueermann said, “While a national response is important and necessary, we can and should find ways to address mental health-related gun violence at the local level. The police, school officials, mental health specialists, parents, and community leaders need practical, evidence-based suggestions about the prevention of these tragedies. And they need them now. We can leverage the taxpayers’ investment in policing, mental health systems, and research into “what works” by giving the police three clear recommendations.”

The three things every police chief or sheriff should know about preventing mental health-related gun violence are:

1. The police should create local partnerships with mental health service providers, school officials, and appropriate community groups to develop a *mental health crisis response* capacity;
2. Police chiefs and sheriffs should use the bully pulpit afforded them to keep community focus on the need for mental health services and convene local service providers and community members to enhance knowledge about local needs, services, and the science of mental illness and gun violence; and,
3. Police chiefs and sheriffs should adopt policies and practices that help reduce the availability of firearms to people in mental health crisis, institutionalize mental health training for their officers, and facilitate community-wide “mental health first aid” training for all community members.

The group will continue its work to provide the police, community members, and local policymakers with evidence-based tools that build on these recommendations and sharpen the focus on preventing mental health-related gun violence. This is the first of a series of meetings the Foundation will host on critical issues facing the police and the communities they serve.

In addition to the Police Foundation, the following organizations participated in the roundtable discussion: American Psychological Association; National Institute of Mental Health; US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, Civil Rights Division, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, and FBI Behavioral Science Unit; International Association of Chiefs of Police; Police Executive Research Forum; Mothers Against Drunk Driving; National Council for Behavioral Health; Office of New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; US Department of Homeland Security; New Haven CT Police Department; Montgomery County MD Police Department; and researchers from George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, the University of Maryland, Johns Hopkins University, University of Virginia, and West Virginia University.

About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation, created in 1970 by the Ford Foundation, is America's oldest nonpartisan, nonprofit police research organization whose mission is to advance policing through innovation and science. Motivating all of the foundation's efforts is the goal of efficient, effective, humane policing that operates within the framework of democratic principles and the highest ideals of the nation.

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