



# Understanding Law Enforcement

## Discussion Guide

### Let's review

*At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room.*

*And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.*

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so be prepared to hear a different point of view. Listen first, and focus on the facts.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

**The "Table-it" Rule:** If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

### Let's begin

*Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief.*

- Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
- What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

### Let's discuss

*Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.*

- In your opinion, what is the priority in police reform?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- Does law enforcement have too many responsibilities in serving communities? If so, what should officers focus on, and how should other challenges be addressed?
- What is your opinion on reallocating funding for police departments?
- If you have had encounters with the police, what have they been like? Do you personally know any police officers?
- How familiar are you with police officers in your community? Do you have opportunities to interact with police officers?
- Would you consider volunteering with your police department or participating in a ride-along? Why or why not?

# Let's act

## Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- Boston established the [first municipal police department](#) in 1838.
- There are over [19,000](#) local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, and about [2.2 officers](#) for every 1000 Americans.
- [Local police departments employ](#) the vast majority of all law enforcement officers, employing approximately 640,000 officers.
- [Spending on state and local police](#) has increased from \$42 billion in 1977 to \$115 billion in 2017 (adjusted for inflation), over 85% of which is local spending.
- On average, [two-thirds of police spending is dedicated](#) to payroll (salaries and benefits), with more set aside for pensions.
- As of 2020, only [Nevada and South Carolina](#) mandate body cameras for law enforcement personnel.
- According to [Blue H.E.L.P.](#), 228 officers died by suicide in 2019, up from 168 in 2017. This means more officers die by suicide annually than [in the line of duty](#).
- Of the [700 hours](#) of average training for police recruits, about 60 hours are dedicated to firearms training and 50 hours to self-defense training. In contrast, fewer than 30 hours are dedicated to community policing.

## Engage Locally

- *Learn more*
  - **Research your elected representatives' positions** on police reform vision for how to tackle policing challenges facing Americans and your community.
    - Your legislators, state comptroller, attorney general and other local elected officials want to know their constituents. Write to them about your interest in law enforcement and police reform.
    - You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
  - **Explore the impact of policing in your community.**
    - Search on your state or municipality's website for the Department of Corrections or the Attorney General's Office.
      - Visit the [National Association of Attorneys General](#) to find out who your AG is.
    - Search for laws in your state regarding [body cameras](#) and [use of force](#).
    - Investigate whether your state is part of the [Police Data Initiative](#).
- *Reach out*
  - Explore what organizations, legislators, and journalists you could contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged.
  - If you have trouble finding the information you are looking for on your municipality's website, consider contacting agency or department heads. You can find the contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#).

- The Policy Circle offers a number of resources for engaging on the local level. Learn how to write a letter to the editor on [The Policy Circle website](#).
- It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).

#### Post a Recap/Dive Deeper

- Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- Decide your next meeting topic. Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? This brief is part of the Five for Communities [Conversation Series](#). Other briefs in these series include:
  - [Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods](#)
  - [The Opioid Epidemic](#)
- Dive Deeper into this area. If this is an area you would like to pursue further consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness.