



# 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

- Take five minutes to walk through the brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- 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?

### Spread the word: facts to share during your discussion

- 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 650,000 officers.
- [Spending on state and local police](#) 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, benefits), with more set aside for pensions.
- According to [Blue H.E.L.P.](#), officer suicides increased from 149 in 2016 to 239 in 2019, then fell to 174 in 2020. This means more officers die by suicide annually than in the line of duty; the FBI reported [89 officers were killed in 2019](#) and [93 were killed in 2020](#).

## Let's discuss

*Below are questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.*

- **Community:** 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?
- **Responsibilities:** Does law enforcement have too many responsibilities in serving communities? If so, what should officers focus on, and how should other challenges be addressed?
- **Funding:** What is your opinion on reallocating funding for police departments?

## Let's act

1. **Take it local.** Talk to neighbors, friends, and family to hear their perspectives and their experiences with local law enforcement officers. Consider hosting another conversation with these community members, and if there is a way to include law enforcement.
2. **Explore the impact of legislation 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](#).
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. Investigate whether your state is part of the [Police Data Initiative](#). See if your city or state has enacted a [community policing or safety program](#).
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on law enforcement, and their vision for how to tackle related challenges of public safety facing Americans and your community. 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.
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** 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](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on law enforcement and public safety in your local paper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

## Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. 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? Suggestions include:
  - [Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods](#)
  - [The Opioid Epidemic](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** 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. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.