



Aurora Police Department Initiatives for Enhancing Community Relations

Aurora Police Chief Nick Metz





351,000 Residents in Aurora



The Aurora Police Department (APD) is a major metropolitan municipal law enforcement agency serving just over 351,000 residents.

APD is nationally accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, and employs **665** officers and **135** civilians. APD is nationally recognized and respected for its handling of a mass shooting that occurred inside a movie theater on July 20, 2012. This attack involved a lone gunman and resulted in 12 deaths with 70 others injured. Agency members are

attributed with saving the lives of many injured victims through direct transports to area hospitals while other public safety personnel were en route or attempted to access the scene.

The department also received national attention for its participation and partnerships with federal agencies and the Denver Police Department while providing security during the 2008 Democratic National Convention.

Despite accolades for performance associated with these and many other events, APD leadership understands this department is not immune to the criticisms and mistrust felt by some in our community. Technological advancements (i.e., body cameras, cellular phone video capabilities, social media, etc.) have provided an unprecedented insight into policing, providing an extraordinary opportunity for transparency for law enforcement.

Conversely, that same technology has also captured and reported on acts by police officers that were questionable, deserving of policy reviews, and in some regards, criminal. The increased insight into policing and high profile officer-involved incidents has had a negative impact on the public's perception of police officers. Agencies across the country are responding to the negative perceptions and issues of mistrust within their community by bringing forward initiatives aimed not just at reducing crime, but also enhancing – and in some instances, developing – community partnerships.

The APD has an organizational mission: "To make Aurora safer every day." Achieving this mission is simply not possible without the support, trust and cooperation of the community. Since starting as Chief of Police in March 2015, I have identified a number of opportunities for initiatives to enhance the relationship between the police department and the community. In fact, they model many of the recommendations set forth in the "Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing – May 2015." (It should be noted that a copy of the report has been provided to members at the rank of Lieutenant and above.) The initiatives are summarized on the following pages.



Initiatives

A. Reorganize the Department (April 2015)

To establish a culture of transparency and accountability, to strive for a more diverse workforce, and to improve the workplace efficiency and operation of the department, the APD was reorganized in April 2015. Highlights of that reorganization are:

- a. **Diversification of staff and promoting internal procedural fairness** at the Executive ranks.
 1. For the first time in the organization's 108-year history, a female member was appointed to the position of Division Chief.
 2. For only the second time in the organization's history, a Latino male was appointed to the position of District Commander.
 3. The first African American was appointed Executive Officer to the Chief of Police.
- b. **A new Compliance and Professional Standards Division was created**, which is responsible for the research, review, amendment and development of APD policies and procedures. This command oversees the agency's training unit and those responsible for recruiting new officers. Also under this division, a newly appointed Division Chief will review the department's use of force policies to make sure APD is following best practices when it comes to the training, reporting, investigating, reviewing and tracking officer use of force incidents.
- c. **The addition of a new in-house legal advisor**, assigned by the City Attorney's Office and located within the Office of the Chief of Police. The responsibilities of the position include:
 - Assisting with drafting and developing policies and procedures.
 - Advising on personnel issues.
 - Assisting staff in handling discovery and records requests from attorneys, law enforcement agencies, and the general public.
 - Conducting in-service training for members on matters of federal, state, and local law.
 - Preparing and reviewing legal documents, as needed.
 - Monitoring, reviewing, and helping to draft legislation—as it relates to enforcement issues.
 - Providing legal updates and alerts to APD personnel.
 - Providing general guidance and advice on criminal and civil law matters.
- d. **The addition of more oversight and responsibilities to the Internal Affairs Bureau.** Operations were previously overseen by a Lieutenant. Now, increased responsibilities and added staffing will be under the direction of a Commander.



Initiatives



B. Enhance and Relocate the Internal Affairs Bureau

To reaffirm a culture of accountability and to promote legitimacy internally, the APD made significant changes to the Internal Affairs Bureau, which is primarily responsible for investigating allegations of misconduct involving officers.

- a. **The Bureau was relocated from Police Headquarters to a new off-site location** with a separate entrance to its offices. The move is intended to improve access and service to the community.
- b. **Two additional investigators have been assigned to the Bureau.** The unit previously consisted of a Lieutenant, two Sergeants, and an Administrative Technician. The unit now consists of the newly appointed Commander, a Lieutenant, two Sergeants, two Agents, and an Administrative Technician. The increase in staffing (from three to six investigators) will allow for all complaints to come into a central location for screening and investigative assignment, applying a consistent approach.
- c. **Policy and procedures will continue to be reviewed** with the intent of improving the quality and timeliness of investigations, and to ensure appropriate strategies are applied and outcomes achieved to increase trust with the public APD serves.

C. Work With The Community and City Officials to Establish a new Independent Review Board (IRB)

This review board will consist of citizens appointed by the Aurora City Council, serving alongside police officers.

- a. **The Independent Review Board is impaneled to review police actions** in controversial incidents. Board members also assist the Chief of Police in a deliberative process to recommend discipline for instances of sustained misconduct by subject members.



- b. **To be appointed by the council to the Independent Review Board**, citizens complete an application and are screened. Upon being nominated and confirmed by the city council, Independent Review Board members undergo training and serve a three-year term as part of a 20-person pool.

D. Designate a Recruitment Committee

- a. The committee will include internal members and private sector business partners working together to develop departmental police recruiting strategies and approaches.
- b. The committee will make recommendations to the Chief of Police, seeking not only to enhance the overall quality and quantity of applicants, but also to improve the diversification among applicants and build an organization that more closely mirrors Aurora’s multi-cultural community.

E. Establish a Departmentwide Body Worn Camera program

- a. **Aurora City Council adopted \$217,515 in the 2015 budget for the Police Body Camera Program.**
 - 1. The amount will outfit uniformed personnel with body worn cameras at one of three district stations, as well as some tactical units. Beginning as early as August 2015 and continuing through December 2015, budgeted cameras will be deployed in phases.
 - 2. The amount also provides for additional staff to process video data and increase data storage capabilities.
- b. The proposed 2016 budget contains monetary amounts needed to outfit the remainder of uniformed members.

F. Engage in Increased Community Outreach

- a. **Use of Technology**
 - 1. APD maintains a website to share information and make services accessible to the public. The website delineates how to file a commendation or complaint on a police officer, join the agency, participate in citizen academies, or volunteer for APD. It also enables community members to self-initiate filing some types of reports online.
 - 2. APD uses social media as a means to interact with citizens. We maintain accounts with Facebook, Twitter and Nextdoor.com. In fact, we proudly host two Twitter accounts – one in English and the other in Spanish.
- b. **Personal Involvement and Commitment**
 - 1. Uniformed officers of all ranks are encouraged to engage in positive interactions with community members. Policing is expected to occur outside the patrol vehicle, not solely from within it.
 - 2. Officers of all ranks attend community forums or services involving communities of faith. Participating members proudly wear their uniform on such occasions to lessen the apprehension it causes some, and to show that the uniform also represents positive community interaction. If event hosts make known concerns that officers wearing the uniform may be disruptive and hosts can't be dissuaded, APD will attend in plain clothes.





Initiatives

3. Command officers regularly attend meetings and events to educate and serve as resources for community groups seeking equality. Organizations we partner with include the NAACP, Urban League, and Rights for All People. The city of Aurora also hosts a group called the Key Community Response Team (KCRT), which is composed of community leaders and activists who meet monthly to share information and address matters of concern involving the city's public safety departments.

The APD works closely with various leaders to create additional community councils to undertake and lead in solving issues that impact the perception of law enforcement, both nationally and locally.

4. APD has a nationally recognized Volunteers in Policing Program that has existed for over 43 years. The program comprises citizens of all ages. In 2014, a total of 488 volunteers donated 33,685 hours, which saved the city \$759,597. The APD's citizen volunteer program includes:
 - **Victim Services** – provide emotional support and intervention for crime victims.
 - **Chaplains** – provide counseling and support for officers and the community.
 - **Interpreters** – provide translation and interpretation services to assist officers with serving the city's broad and diverse communities.
 - **Explorers** – provide young people interested in law enforcement the opportunity to be mentored by officers, receive training, and perform community service.
 - **Citizen & Teen Police Academies** – provide adults and teens condensed versions of training in police services. Participants are then expected to provide support for non-enforcement police activities and serve at special community events.

The partnership with our citizen volunteers has both expanded and enhanced the police services provided to our community, and is integral to APD's operations.

5. APD sponsors other youth programs for ages ranging from 5 to 18. These include providing educational programming and an array of prevention and intervention services that build youth resiliency to drugs, gangs, and violence.

G. Evaluate and Revise Officer Training Renewed focus on training in de-escalation techniques and use of less lethal devices during entry level academies and annual in-service sessions. APD is also currently looking at the feasibility of bringing procedural justice training, sponsored by the Department of Justice’s Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office, to our agency.

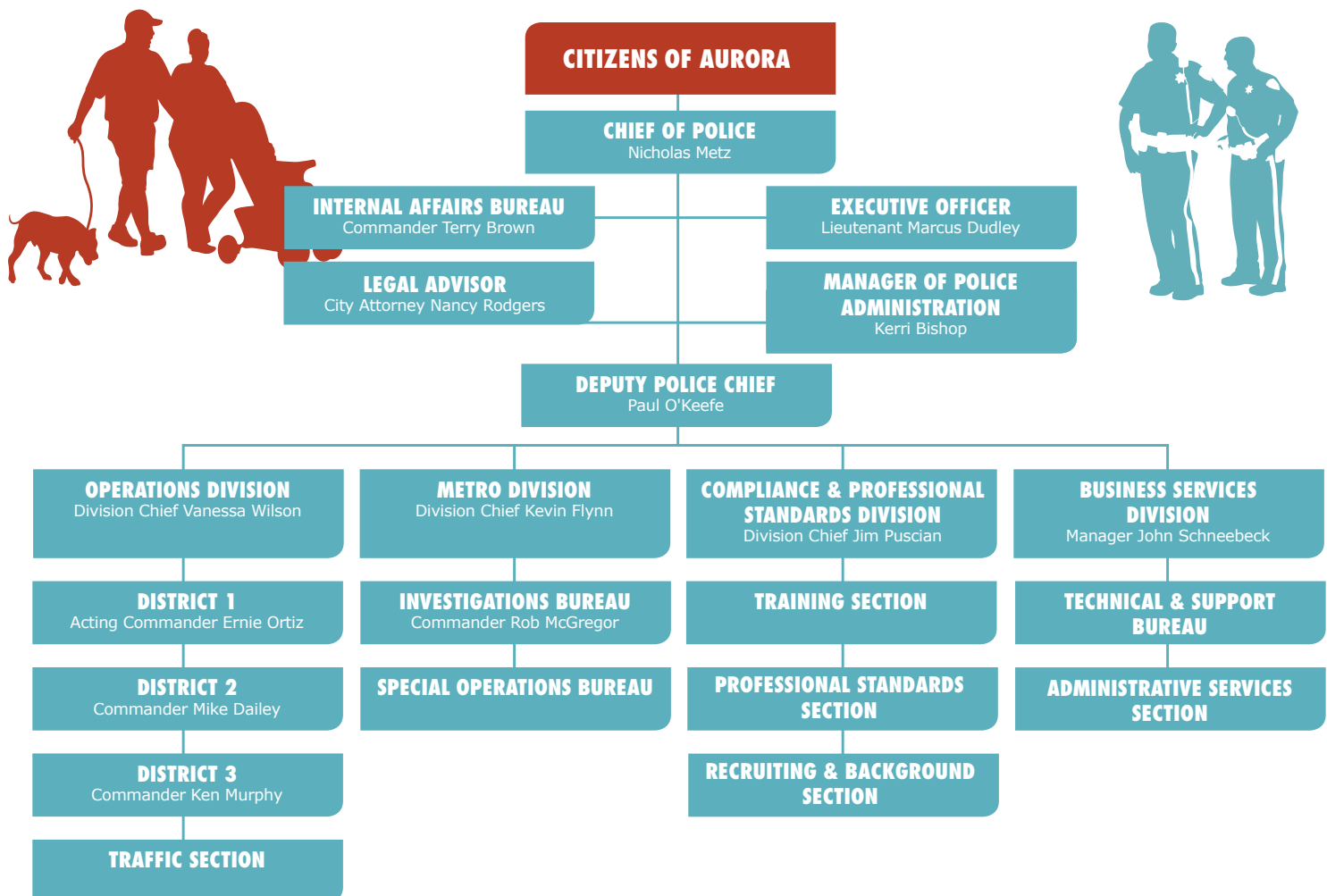
H. Promote Officer Wellness and Safety

a. Personnel Early Intervention System

1. A time-sensitive system designed to monitor risk indicators and promptly identify certain performance and/or stress related issues to facilitate any necessary or appropriate follow-up activities by supervisors for their employees. Alerts are emailed directly to supervisors for early intervention when indicators are triggered as a result of the automated Performance Appraisal Entry system.
2. It is not a discipline system, but rather a system to help APD identify members who may need assistance.
3. Supervisors are responsible for initiating the review process of any activities by the employee that cause the alert. The review, counseling of the subordinate, any recommendation(s) for assistance, and notification up the employee’s chain of command are required.

b. Wellness for Officers

1. Peer Support Program – This consists of fellow members trained to provide support to officers experiencing personal or professional crisis.
2. Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Training – APD will implement tools from this crisis intervention system to assist members with understanding their experience and provide methods to appropriately debrief after critical incidents.
3. Psychological Services – APD contracts with a service provider that specializes in police psychology, crisis intervention, trauma recovery, and violence prevention. APD members are permitted to self-refer or referrals can be initiated by the employee’s supervisor.



Conclusion:

Each of the initiatives described in this report supports the goal of and opportunities for APD to strengthen community relations and to promote agency transparency. We encourage members to think outside traditional means as we seek opportunities to grow existing community partnerships and develop new ones.

I recently met with the Department of Justice's Community Relations Service and look forward to establishing a solid working partnership, as we continue to learn and move forward with implementation of our initiatives.

These are challenging times for law enforcement nationwide. However, we believe that through working together with the members of our community, as well as our local and federal law enforcement partners, we can further connect with our community and "make Aurora safer every day."

Aurora Police Chief Nick Metz,



Worth Discovering
auroragov.org