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**MECHANISM FOR REVIEWING  
LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVICES**

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The attached article was written by a graduate of The Command College, Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), California.

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## **MECHANISM FOR REVIEWING LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVICES**

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Command College Class 16  
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## MECHANISM FOR REVIEWING LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVICES

The issue of law enforcement service review encompasses not only the more familiar citizens complaint scenario, but also a myriad of other areas. The review of policy and procedures, prior to their implementation and then following their use to ensure community compatibility, represents an often overlooked area of need. Program review involving interested or effected community members, completed in a constructive manner, can generate community support during tight fiscal conditions and also allow for prompt modification when outmoded or nonproductive practices occur. The transference of information between the community and its law enforcement organization allows each to stay abreast of the other and to work together in a manner that supports common goals. The "we/they" syndrome that traps many communities and their law enforcement organizations, occasionally pitting one against the other, can then be favorably impacted.

Historically, significant conflict has existed between law enforcement and the different segments of the communities where law enforcement exists to provide services. Conflict surrounds such areas as labor disputes, racism, unpopular political stances, use of force, majority rule, homelessness, substance abuse and specific enforcement tactics, as well as different programs. Sometimes, the conflict and associated emotions are directed at law enforcement organizations and other times law enforcement finds itself embroiled in a peace-keeping effort. It is not all that infrequent

that one hears about the efforts of law enforcement at keeping the peace or enforcing laws at rallies, demonstrations, celebrations or other mass gatherings. Indeed, the very system that law enforcement is a major component of, is based upon adversarial relationships -- just examine the structure of our justice system.

How law enforcement leaders manage all of this conflict often determines the future for their organization. It impacts the quality of life in our communities, law enforcement budgets, the political processes and the morale of the people who work in law enforcement organizations. In essence, it is one of the most important efforts made by law enforcement. Yet, how often are predictable situations handled through the use of crisis management -- thus risking greater conflict? Most would agree, particularly at the line level, that this is the norm rather than the exception.

Examining potential issues and evaluating the impacts they might have on law enforcement in the future, places an organization in the position of being able to develop strategies to deal with the probable impacts. Issues can often be examined through a review process. A review need not be dissension-based. It is possible to develop a positive arena from which to review. Remembering the lessons learned from past experience, so as not to repeat any mistakes, is key; as is implementing improvements based upon the lessons learned from the review and evaluation process. This represents a significant improvement over a crisis response.

The question to be raised and discussed in this article then

is: What will be the community review mechanism for law enforcement services in a mid-size law enforcement agency by the year 2000? This question will be discussed with the understanding that although every community has its own unique cultural, economic and historic concerns, each also has a great deal in common. These commonalities will allow similar, albeit customized, modes of review to exist in any community, should law enforcement and/or the community desire such.

Developed via a "Futures Wheel" determination process which is designed to identify all possible relationships, several sub-issues were identified as being associated with the question of what a community review mechanism for law enforcement services might be. For example: What will community expectations regarding review of law enforcement services require in the future that are different from today? Such a question requires a careful examination of the future, probable trend directions and potential event impacts. Trends and events occur all the time. Unfortunately, their existence and probable impacts are not always given the attention they deserve prior to forecasting a potential future. This can result in a false forecast.

Another sub-issue is: Can law enforcement employee concerns over confidentiality of personnel information be adequately addressed to allow for the existence of a community mechanism for input and review of law enforcement services? This sub-issue requires an examination of current employee concerns in the arena of public information versus confidentiality. An evaluation of

reasonable employee expectations which will be compatible with the public's best interest is in order. A need to allay employee concerns and fears about the confidentiality of their personnel information exists.

The last sub-issue to be addressed in this article is: Can non-law enforcement trained people understand law enforcement concerns and issues well enough to provide direction to law enforcement? A redundant question when one considers the level of direction provided now through Mayors, City Councils, City Managers, Board of Supervisors, County Administrative Officers, and various other non-law enforcement trained people. None the less, this continues to be a question/issue heard again, and again amid law enforcement circles.

As the issue of a community-based mechanism for review of law enforcement services is studied, it becomes clear that many different types of review mechanisms currently exist. A few communities already have civilian complaint review commissions. However, their focus is extremely narrow and their histories brimming with conflict. A couple of entities, such as the Los Angeles Police Department and the San Francisco Police Department, have politically appointed Police Commissions. Many organizations utilize service feedback questionnaires or contacts and yet others conduct community surveys.

Other mechanisms exist which are not actually referred to as review mechanisms or even knowingly used as such. This is unfortunate as law enforcement may be missing an opportunity that

lies directly in front of it. For example, Neighborhood Watch meetings frequently cover experiences with their law enforcement representatives based upon incidents which have already occurred. Volunteers in law enforcement programs have their input solicited during program reviews. The same holds true with trainees upon completion of the Field Training and Evaluation Program. Critical incident debriefings involving law enforcement personnel are routine, or.... unquestionably should be.

Yet, with all of the above review processes occurring at different levels and different places, mention the words "review of law enforcement services" and most law enforcement personnel shudder at the thought. Such a negative connotation occurs primarily because of the association that the review function has with civilian review boards which deal with citizen complaints. Once all of the review that is occurring is recognized, evaluated and put into perspective, it might almost seem hypocritical for law enforcement personnel to condemn the concept of reviewing law enforcement services. One of the reasons such feelings or fears prevail is due to what the authors of the book Beyond 911, A New Era for Policing<sup>1</sup>, describe as the underlying basic values associated with the reform model of policing: "Informal and dwelling deep within the law enforcement culture exist six basic building blocks to the police culture. They include the following beliefs:

1. We are the only real crime fighters.
2. No one else understands the real nature of police work.



3. Loyalty to colleagues counts above everything else.
4. It is impossible to win the war against crime without bending the rules.
5. Members of the public are basically unsupportive and unreasonably demanding.
6. Patrol work is the pits."

Failing to recognize and understand the existence of the informal but very strong culture existing within law enforcement, is asking for immediate internal conflict at the risk of losing any ability to modify and redirect these informal values and beliefs towards something which is more professional.

The question arises as to why there is so much public sentiment expressed for the concept of reviewing law enforcement services. Particularly, in the arena of citizen complaints, when so much other review already exists. The short answer may be that law enforcement has not packaged their review processes in a manner that is recognizable to the public -- or to themselves for that matter -- as review components. Also, it is quite likely that several meaningful modes of review are missing from each agency. The combination of both deficiencies is enough to give cause to question the entire concept.

Add to the public's concerns, such potential events as: another "Rodney King" incident; or, a series of hate crimes occurring; or, a statewide system of police review commissions being enacted; or, Peace Officer Standards and Training is eliminated; or, a state law outlawing pursuits is passed, and it is even more

important that law enforcement be sensitive to the concerns that the public might have. All of the events mentioned have the possibility of occurring in the future. In fact, several could occur simultaneously. The occurrence of any of these events will place increased stresses upon law enforcement and their communities. If any of these events were to occur within close proximity in time to one another, the end result could have devastating impacts for many communities. Even though law enforcement should be anticipating this very scenario today, many organizations will respond to such events, including the public emotions they generate, utilizing crisis management as opposed to a well thought-out, community-based strategy. Having had these events already occur in our country, and having had an opportunity to not only review these events, but to also include the community in the review process, and having had an opportunity to develop an organization/community-based response to future similar events (except for the surprise nature of their timing) there would seem to be no excuse for a crisis response by law enforcement management to similar events in the future. However, both the nature of people as well as the working reality of a law enforcement organization, may preclude a strategy from being developed beforehand.

Add to the above predicament several key trends which are likely to occur during the next ten years such as: an increase in public scrutiny of law enforcement, and an increase in violent crime, and a slight increase in civil disobedience and an explosive

mixture could result.

What can law enforcement -- any law enforcement agency -- do in order to be prepared to deal with this scenario? Working towards the year 2000, the development of formal Community Advisory Boards as the centerpiece of an Integrated Community Review Mechanism is strongly recommended.

As an arm of the Office of the Chief of Police, or of the Sheriff, a Community Advisory Board, meeting publicly, simply provides one more means of communication between law enforcement agencies and their community. Perhaps Robert Trojanowicz<sup>2</sup> said it best, "Another 'must do' for police administrators is to inform citizens that their participation is crucial. Community policing issues a challenge to residents to become part of the solution to the problem." An excellent way for a law enforcement leader to make such a statement is to formulate a Community Advisory Board.

At the discretion of the agency, a Community Advisory Board can represent the entire community, or there can be separate advisory boards for the different geographic, political or ethnic areas within a community as determined by each particular jurisdiction.

As stated by past Portland Police Chief Tom Potter<sup>3</sup>, "We've got to create family units in neighborhoods, create a sense of community in neighborhoods, and make people feel responsible for their families, their neighborhoods and their communities." Consequently, depending upon the size and geographical layout of a community, it might make more sense to have several advisory boards

that relate to identifiable parts of the community.

Formalized in the sense that they fit into the scheme of the law enforcement organization in a manner that is recognized internally and externally, an advisory board may actually be informal as it relates to the running of government. Advisory only, its strength comes from the authority of and working relationship with, the Chief or Sheriff. This is an important point. The purpose of the Advisory Board is not to direct the agency, but rather, to provide alternative ideas and review in a setting that is politically a low risk, but potentially high in productivity and communication. This combination can create an ideal setting in which to conduct issue-oriented community forums and other group meetings.

It is equally important that the rank and file of the law enforcement agency accept and promote the existence of the community advisory board. Their assistance with this concept is extremely important; as is their involvement and participation.

The location of meetings is important too. Each community may vary in their respective needs or desires concerning the location at which the Community Advisory Board meets. Flexibility is necessary. The ability to meet outside as well as inside the police department facility can help accommodate different segments of the community. It may be necessary to take the Advisory Board to specific locations as an outreach effort to community areas or members that feel segregated from their law enforcement organization. Although the size of the law enforcement facility

can be a controlling factor, it might also be helpful to invite the community into the police facility for Advisory Board meetings. Law enforcement managers often fail to notice the aura of a "closed society" that tends to surround their agencies. Generally, there is much community curiosity about the law enforcement agency. Such openness can send a strong message of partnership to the community.

Internal and external evaluations by the Chief or Sheriff must occur prior to implementing an Advisory Board. Internally, it is critical that the mission statement for the organization set the tone for community input and participation. The people within the organization must be amenable to the concept and educated about its benefits and potential pitfalls. There should be clear lines delineating who is responsible for the operation and staffing of the Advisory Board. The organizational chart should paint a picture for the viewer of how the Advisory Board fits into the organization. The Chief or Sheriff and their staff must be prepared to involve themselves internally in communication intervention in order to keep the organization on track with their investment in the Advisory Board. This is meant to ensure, at every step, that internal concerns do not emanate outward in a manner that could spell failure for the Advisory Board and, in the process, the organization's efforts at working in partnership with the community.

The contents of the Mission Statement may dictate the potential for success, not just of the Advisory Board, but in relationship to all outreach efforts by the organization. Not just

a few words to be shelved once completed like so many other projects, it must be a value driven document that the organization lives by and evaluates itself by. It is the heart of any review guidelines. Those values most important to include were reported quite succinctly by Sparrow, Moore and Kennedy<sup>4</sup>: "Harvard's Executive Session on Policing polled chiefs who participated in its sessions about the values they had established to guide their organizations. Their responses fell into a pattern--not only in terms of what values were represented but also in the order in which they appeared....

1. Police should fully embrace democratic and constitutional values.
2. Police should define their role in the community broadly to achieve their greatest value.
3. Police should seek close relationships with the communities they serve to ensure responsiveness.
4. Police should conduct themselves in an exemplary manner in their private and public lives.
5. Police departments should provide a decent working environment.
6. Police should emphasize crime prevention and the maintenance of order as well as crime control and law enforcement.
7. Police should use public resources economically and fairly.
8. Police should conduct themselves with professional integrity."

By replacing those previously mentioned informal values of the "old school" with the above set of more professional values, the law enforcement executive should be able to create an environment which supports community involvement in the law enforcement effort.

Externally, the Chief or Sheriff, must identify those community entities important enough to be represented on the Advisory Board. A strong internal, perhaps even personal, commitment to work with everyone and not to offend any group is required. A desire to make the Advisory Board as representative as possible, but not at the expense of becoming too unwieldy, might present an interesting challenge. Each community is different in this respect. The executive must work with different key community members in determining the make-up of their Advisory Board(s).

Politically, perhaps more so for the appointed Chief than an elected Chief or Sheriff, it is absolutely mandatory that a serious and sincere effort be made to build an Advisory Board(s) that is not designed to perform as a political power base from which to operate. Such a configuration could quickly disgruntle the powers that be on the political body representing the jurisdiction (Council or Board). This could occur to the degree that the Chief or Sheriff negate the effectiveness of the Advisory Board and bring a short life expectancy to their own career. Such an ill-conceived effort could actually be construed as contrary to the goal of building honest partnerships between a community and their law enforcement organization.

The Community Advisory Board is the center of an Integrated

Community Review Mechanism. It must be supported by other means of review and community/law enforcement communication. Otherwise it may simply be viewed as another "token law enforcement program." Although each community has different needs and desires which will dictate what and how many programs are used, it would not be inappropriate to use all of the following: Community Surveys, Program Feedback Polls, Volunteer Pool Critiques, Service Feedback Contacts, Community Oriented/Problem Oriented Policing, Occasional Community Forums (Issue Oriented), Periodic Neighborhood Meetings, Citizens Orientation Program (Academy), A Community Outreach Unit, Law Enforcement/Community Partnerships, Educational Outreach Efforts. All of these efforts entail the ability, or direct purpose, of soliciting feedback for review purposes. Depicted in Figure #1 is a Law Enforcement Services Integrated Community Review Mechanism Chart which displays this.

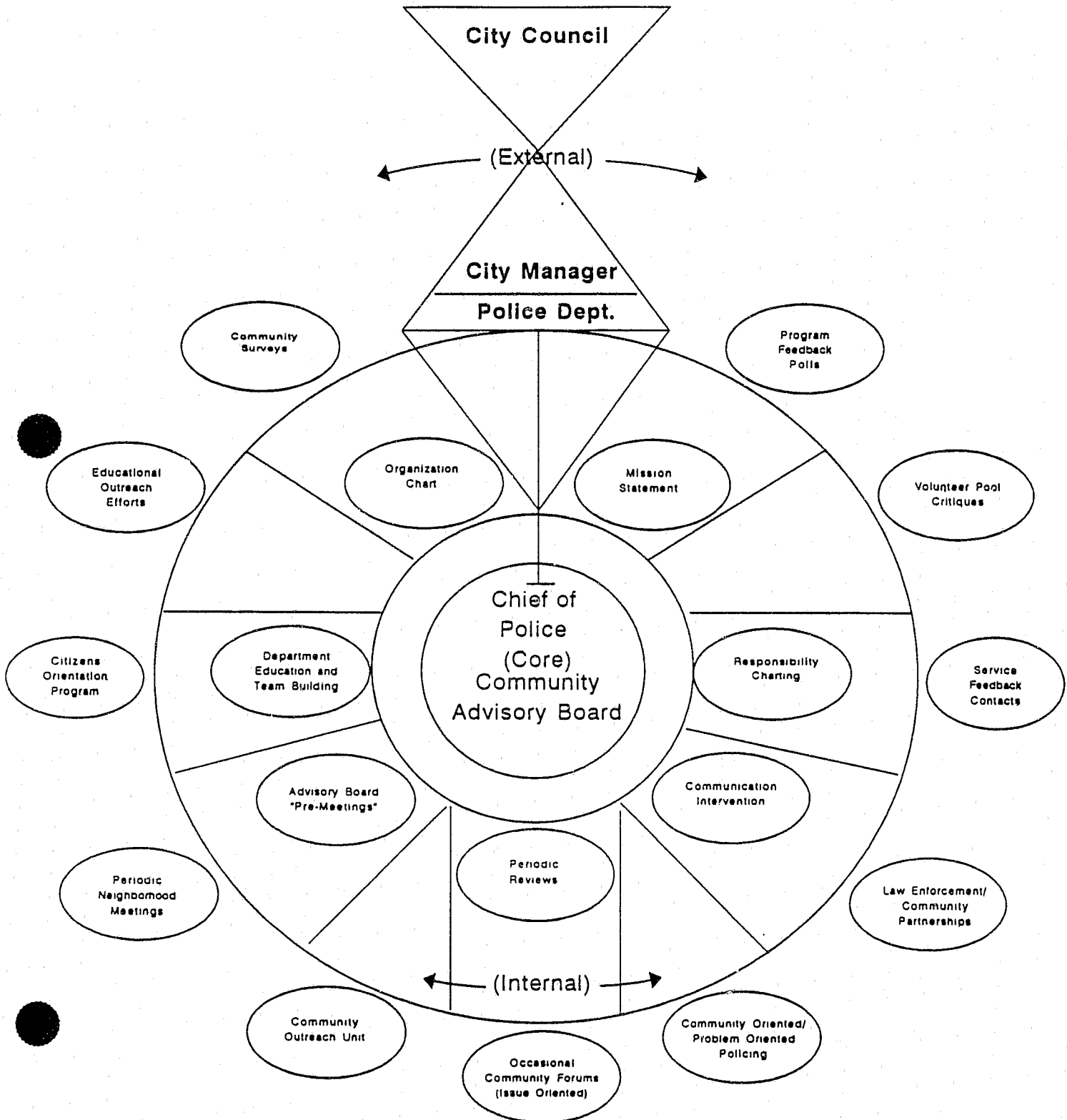
It may be possible, in short order, to implement a Community Advisory Board. However, to effectively modify law enforcement's informal, reform era values, to those of a more professional era; and, to build a cadre of supporting programs designed and used to solicit feedback; and, to educate the community and law enforcement about this integrated review mechanism, will likely take years.

The Law Enforcement Services Integrated Community Review Mechanism Chart was developed by the author. It is intended to provide the reader with a picture of the components that are useful for developing a review mechanism and afford an opportunity to visualize a wholistic approach to this concept.



Law Enforcement Services  
 Integrated Community Review Mechanism Chart  
 (with supporting methods)

**COMMUNITY**



A random survey of over forty, medium size, municipal law enforcement organizations in the State of California revealed that each had one or more of the programs mentioned in this document already in place and working. It also revealed that none of the organizations had formed an integrated approach by combining all of their community outreach, review and communications efforts into one recognized systems approach. Because of this, all of their efforts were, in a sense, fragmented.

More than half of the organizations were relying upon the concept of community oriented or problem solving policing to "glue their efforts together." This approach is reminiscent of law enforcements' use of crime prevention programs in the 1960's and 1970's. There seems to exist an unspoken hope that community oriented policing will work as a panacea for solving existing police/community issues that are conflict oriented.

Law enforcement executive leadership, its existence or its absence, will determine the success or failure of future relationships between law enforcement and the people they serve. Those tradition bound law enforcement practitioners, fearful of innovation and creativity, will undoubtedly struggle with the concept of a Community Advisory Board; probably even more so by the thought of an integrated community review mechanism for law enforcement services and the prospect of trying to sell it to their organization. However, those leaders who are dedicated to improving policing practices may find the concept both exciting and challenging.

It may have been best stated by the authors in Beyond 911: A New Era for Policing<sup>5</sup>, "There is a lesson here for police executives. Consider what makes for a comfortable life. All the time a vessel goes straight ahead, there is no pressure on and no need for the rudder. But try to turn the ship and constant turbulence surrounds it. Constant turbulence will surround those chiefs who set out to transform the style and nature of their departments. That task will demand perseverance, stamina, farsightedness, and a readiness for substantial buffeting from within and without."

Can non-law enforcement trained people understand law enforcement concerns and issues well enough to provide direction to law enforcement? The challenge may not be whether or not non-law enforcement trained people should be involved in providing direction to law enforcement; but rather, in whether law enforcement can help their communities understand the challenges that lie before them. The practice of seeking each others opinions and listening with respect when they are offered, may be all that is necessary. One need not have a particular expertise to accomplish this. The mere involvement of City Managers, Finance Directors and a host of other government officials is ample indication that non-law enforcement trained people can indeed understand law enforcement concerns and issues adequately.

Can law enforcement employee concerns over confidentiality of personnel information be adequately addressed to allow for the existence of a community mechanism for input and review of law

enforcement services? Leadership must play a solid role to overcome this concern. Intelligent and legal dissemination of potentially confidential personnel information is important to the credibility of the law enforcement executive. The ability exists to use a contract agreement of confidentiality with participants on the Community Advisory Board. Beyond that, careful withholding and release of information is necessary. Representatives from the workforce should strongly be considered for development of and involvement on the Community Advisory Board. After all, they too are part of the community and an important part of the effort. Their participation can help salve some of the concern over this issue. Rather than simply responding to direction or feedback from the Community Advisory Board and perhaps feeling a we/they relationship, they can share in its success or failure. Hence, there exists another safety mechanism to assist in maintaining the confidentiality of personnel information which professionalism and legalities indicate should not become a public matter.

What will community expectations regarding review of law enforcement services require in the future that are different from today? Involvement! Participation! A low risk forum in which to express concerns, address issues and partake in honest dialogue is wanted. On top of that, responsiveness to their ideas, concerns and problems. Perhaps not too different than what is expected today. Except, the degree to which involvement and participation are expected will be greater. Law enforcement itself will generate this by asking for greater community participation and assistance -

- something already occurring in some areas via Community Oriented Policing practices.

What will be the community review mechanism for law enforcement services in a mid-size law enforcement agency by the year 2000? A Law Enforcement Services Integrated Review Mechanism, with a Community Advisory Board at its core, will be representative of the type of community review mechanism in existence for law enforcement services. Such a system will allow law enforcement to work with their community in a rational manner during times of stress. It has the potential to act as a release valve, allowing pressure to diffuse without harming the community. It will also allow for communication to occur, during emotional times, until matters stabilize; thereby allowing subsequent decisions, with potentially long-term impacts, to be made in an informative way as opposed to an emotional way. Finally, its simply the right thing to do.

## ENDNOTES

1. Beyond 911: A New Era for Policing, by Sparrow, Moore and Kennedy; Copyright 1990 by Basic Books, pages 50-54.
2. Robert C. Trojanowicz, "Building Support for Community Policing, an Effective Strategy," FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, May, 1986.
3. Chief Tom Potter, Portland Police Department, Nationals Cities Weekly, October 5, 1993, page 4.
4. Beyond 911: A New Era for Policing, by Sparrow, Moore and Kennedy; Copyright 1990 by Basic Books, page 136.
5. Beyond 911: A New Era for Policing, by Sparrow, Moore and Kennedy; Copyright 1990 by Basic Books, page 232.

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