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Making Change in My Community

Over the past few years, society has witnessed through the media the concerns with law enforcement. This topic has hit close to my heart as I come from a family of law enforcement officers. I know that there is another side to those that serve, and I want others to realize that this topic is much broader and more complex than just dismissing the profession as being ridden with bad people. I acknowledge there are bad police officers in the profession, laws need to be adjusted, and more training and education need to be provided for these professionals to deal with the changing needs of society. However, I also know that most of these employees join the force because they want to make a difference and they have as their sole desire to help others. This concern and passion have led be towards the legal profession.

As a teenager in an urban community, my peer group is surrounded by criminal activity. Unfortunately, many of my peers have a negative attitude towards police and those in authoritative positions. We frequently had fights within our schools and often students disrespected teachers and resource officers. My school system had three shootings over the past two years. Two of these incidents involved teens; one was a six-year-old who shot a teacher while in school. I have personally witnessed the aggression towards authority. This attitude and reluctance to trust in law enforcement hinders the department’s efforts in creating a safe community.

As a young adult seeing this trend, I wanted to be an agent of change. In my freshman year of high school, I joined my local police department’s explorer program. This program teaches youth about the criminal justice system and allows participants to participate in police training and practical exercise. Through this program, I have introduced several of my friends to police officers. In addition, this program requires that we participate in community service activities, and I have been able to represent the department in a positive light through community day events and helping with such agencies as the food bank. I currently serve as a Lieutenant and provide a positive light for the police department and youth.  I plan to continue to participate in this program throughout my college years.

I was selected to serve on the Young Adult Police Commission. I served on this board for three years and this program allowed me to be a voice for change. The Commission was created to be a platform for high school students to discuss current events with law enforcement and for us to discuss issues that are affecting the young people in our community. I served as Vice President and worked to establish topics of interest for the group. Students knew that I was a leader in this program and reached out to me to interact with officers on their behalf. This program has been successful for our urban City, and I was able to make an impact on keeping our community safe and opening lines of communication with law enforcement. I was also awarded the citizenship award for my service in this program. Those in law enforcement do understand that they are often out of touch with the youth of the community and have put measures in place to build relationships in these needed areas.

To ensure that I have a good understanding of the current challenges of law enforcement I applied for and was selected to participate in two programs that were offered during my summers. The first was the Citizens Police Academy for Youth. We participated in a week-long program where we got an inside look at local law enforcement through a variety of subjects about police work. The second program I was selected as a candidate to participate in was the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Future Agents in Training program. This program selects a limited number of teens who have demonstrated leadership attributes to participate in classroom instruction and hands-on activities to gain comprehensive knowledge about the FBI.

Through these programs and others, I regularly participate in community outreach events that promote the community policing concept. We strive to ensure that our citizens have good working relationships with police officers and that they feel comfortable in reaching out for their services. I take pride in my leadership role in opening the lines of communication between law enforcement and citizens, especially young adults. My passion to bring my community together will continue through my college and career life.

Change is never easy, and I have witnessed obstacles as it relates to bringing the community together.  There are those on both sides of the debate who seem unable and unwilling to work together for the greater good.  I have personally experienced negative comments and attitudes about the police force even when people do not have directly related experiences with law enforcement.  I have also witnessed those who are strong supporters of law enforcement, refuse to concede that there are needed changes.  To make positive change one must be willing to work together and be accepting of multiple perspectives.

I plan to continue to work in my community to bring about positive change. I will be attending my local university, Christopher Newport University. seeking a bachelor’s degree in political science and plan to participate in their pre-law program and ultimately receive a JD in law. This program offers networking opportunities, internships, and special workshops and seminars which I plan to take advantage of throughout my college years. I am excited about the opportunity to participate in school clubs that have other students with similar interests. While in college I will continue to participate in the Explorers Post so that I can continue to make a positive impact in my community.

 Becoming a lawyer with a political science will increase my ability to bring about change. It will allow me to work in a field where I can build upon the positive change I have already involved with. I will be able to impact legislation and work with those in the system to bring solutions to many of the societal problems that have caused the breakdown between law enforcement and the community. It goes beyond building relationship to really understand the underlying causes that have created the situation.  To be successful it is important to understand the full scope of the challenges and be open to all solutions, working together to make the largest impact. It is through small steps such as these that I will make a lasting impact on my community.