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Research Demonstrates Importance of Supporting Female Representation in Law Enforcement

Research Brief Examines the Persistent Barriers Women in Policing Face and Offers Solutions to Support Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement in the Profession

Sacramento, CA – Today, during Women’s History Month, the [Peace Officers Research Association of California](#) (PORAC) released a new [issue brief](#) compiling leading research and input from expert sources demonstrating the critical yet often overlooked role of women in law enforcement. The brief highlights the unique contributions that female officers make in strengthening public trust, improving policing outcomes, and fostering safer communities. However, despite these contributions, women remain significantly underrepresented in departments nationwide and continue to face barriers to recruitment, retention, and advancement. The brief explores these challenges and calls for meaningful reforms to build a law enforcement workforce that better reflects America’s communities.

“Women have long played a crucial role in law enforcement, bringing invaluable skills and perspectives that strengthen public safety,” **said Brian Marvel, President of PORAC.** “As we recognize Women’s History Month, this report underscores the strides we’ve made in supporting women in policing while pointing to the ongoing efforts needed to elevate their presence and ensure they have the resources and opportunities to succeed at every level.”

Key takeaways from the brief include:

- **Female Officers Improve Community Policing:** Research shows that female officers are linked to decreased use of force, improved community trust, and better outcomes for crime victims.
- **Underrepresentation is a Nationwide Problem:** Women make up only 14% of sworn officers, 20% of recruits, and less than 9% of chiefs in state and local law enforcement agencies across the US.
- **Recruitment & Retention Barriers Persist:** Workplace cultures, gender biases, and inadequate family support policies can impact recruitment, retention, and advancement for female officers.
- **Enhancing Workplace Policies is Key:** To build upon progress and broaden pathways into law enforcement for female officers, agencies must implement workplace policies and resources that support working parents – like increasing on-site childcare options and investing in professional development programs.

“I grew up in an underserved community and was the first in my family to graduate college – I’ve never shied away from challenges. Starting my career in a male-dominated field like law enforcement was no different,” **said Veronica Limon, Vice President, San Diego County Probation Officer’s Association.** “I’ve faced barriers, but I was determined to succeed and to serve my community. As a wife, mother, probation



officer, and leader in law enforcement, I know representation matters – there’s room for women in this profession, and I’m living proof."

To address the challenges that women face in law enforcement, agencies and organizations across the country have launched impactful initiatives to support the recruitment and retention of female officers. The [30x30 Initiative](#) is collaborating with agencies to provide resources and implement strategies to increase female representation to 30% by 2030 – over 400 agencies have signed the pledge so far, with 49 of those in California. In addition, several departments in the state have taken additional proactive steps to support women in law enforcement, such as the San Diego Police Officers Association’s launch of the [nation’s first law enforcement-focused childcare center](#), the Los Angeles Airport Peace Officers Association’s annual Women’s Leadership and Empowerment Conference, and the California Police Chiefs Association’s Women Leaders in Law Enforcement Training Symposium.

“We’ve committed to improving policing – making it fairer, addressing barriers, and ensuring women’s unique needs are met,” **said Dr. Tanya Meisenholder, Lead of the 30x30 Initiative.** “We examine what attracts women to the profession – and what pushes them out. Our work focuses on recruitment, hiring, and other critical processes and strategies. We help agencies evaluate their policies to ensure fairness and eliminate bias. But the toughest challenge? Transforming organizational culture – changing the way an agency operates from the inside out.”

PORAC remains committed to advocating for policies that ensure female officers have the support, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed in law enforcement. These include tailored recruitment efforts, enhanced workplace policies to support working parents, and expanded leadership development programs. By prioritizing these reforms, we can build a stronger, more representative workforce that benefits officers, agencies, and the communities they serve.

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About the Peace Officers Research Association of California

The Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC) was incorporated in 1953 as a professional federation of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. PORAC represents over 83,000 public safety members and over 955 associations, making it the largest law enforcement organization in California and the largest statewide association in the nation.