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# Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual and Domestic Violence

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**Summary:** For Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we're focusing on identifying and preventing gender bias in law enforcement response to domestic violence and sexual assault.

Our country is in the midst of an important national dialogue about reforming our criminal justice system, and examining how implicit bias may affect relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Such bias may exist on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, disability, or the frequent intersection of these complex identities. Since October is [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#), I want to focus on the issue of identifying and preventing gender bias in law enforcement response to domestic violence and sexual assault.

In recent years, the Department of Justice (DOJ) conducted several “pattern or practice” investigations of police departments—including in [New Orleans](#), [Puerto Rico](#), [Missoula](#), and most recently in [Baltimore](#)—and identified several instances of gender bias in law enforcement response to violence against women. Following several of these investigations, law enforcement leaders, women’s advocates, and civil rights advocates sought additional guidance from DOJ on how police departments should address potential gender bias in policing.

And DOJ listened. In December 2015, the Attorney General announced new guidance on “[Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence](#).” The Guidance, which was developed in partnership with police leaders, line officers, detectives, and advocates, states that gender bias is a form of discrimination that may result in law enforcement agencies (LEAs) providing less protection to certain victims on the basis of gender, failing to respond to crimes that disproportionately harm a particular gender, or offering less robust services due to a reliance on gender

stereotypes—including those that are based on assumptions or prejudice towards an individual's gender identity or sexual orientation. The guidance, utilizing a series of case examples, calls on LEAs to, at a minimum, adhere to eight baseline principles that are centered on a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach, and to incorporate these principles into clear policies, comprehensive training, and effective supervision protocols. Those [eight principles](#) are:

1. Recognize and address biases, assumptions and stereotypes about victims.
2. Treat all victims with respect and employ interviewing tactics that encourage a victim to participate and provide facts about the incident.
3. Investigate sexual assault or domestic violence complaints thoroughly and effectively.
4. Appropriately classify reports of sexual assault or domestic violence.
5. Refer victims to appropriate services.
6. Properly identify the assailant in domestic violence incidents.
7. Hold officers who commit sexual assault or domestic violence accountable.
8. Maintain, review and act upon data regarding sexual assault and domestic violence.

Publishing the guidance was a first step. To support communities putting the Guidance into practice, the DOJ [recently announced](#) the investment of real money – over \$9 million – into several new pilot and demonstration programs designed to integrate the principles outlined in the Guidance into actual law enforcement agency policies, training, supervision protocols, and systems of accountability. These announcements include:

- A \$5 million award by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) to the International Association of the Chiefs of Police (IACP) to lead an initiative on identifying and preventing gender bias in law enforcement response to victims. Six police departments will work with IACP to develop and implement strategies to improve the police response in sexual and domestic violence cases;
- Awards totaling \$2.85 million by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to five grantees, under OVW's Improving Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence and Stalking Grant Program, to integrate the principles outlined in the DOJ guidance into law enforcement policies, training, supervision protocols, and systems of accountability; and
- Three awards, totaling \$1.65 million, by OVW for national technical assistance to be provided by IACP, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), and End Violence Against Women International, to develop resources, provide trainings, and help build the capacity of police departments and OVW grantees to support implementation of the DOJ guidance.
- A \$400,000 research award by OVW to evaluate the effectiveness of training based on the guidance for sworn officers in an urban police department.

We will undoubtedly learn volumes from these pilot and demonstration programs about how the new DOJ guidance can be implemented in diverse communities across our country.

Zooming out, these initiatives point to a shift in our national response to gender violence—a response that, among other aspects, recognizes the disproportionate effect of domestic violence and sexual assault on women and LGBTQ individuals. This Administration is focused on using the opportunities created by this unique moment to take a hard look at where stereotypes and biases may lie in our system, and to develop legal and social frameworks that focus not only on individual culpability, but also on systemic reform. Such initiatives must address root causes, challenge stereotypes of victims of gender violence, curb victim blaming, and make headway on the prevention front. Most importantly, we must bring to the center those survivors who have traditionally been placed at the margins.

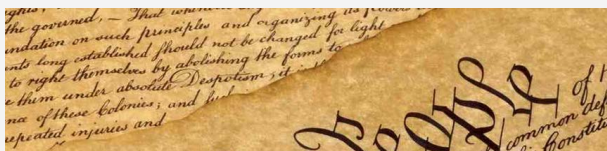


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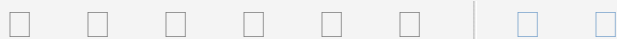
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