

Ronal Serpas

**Remarks at Law Enforcement Summit on
Crime in 2017**

Washington D.C.
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Welcome Remarks: 9:00am

Good morning! I'm Ronal Serpas. I'm the Founding Chairman of Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime and Incarceration, and the former Police Superintendent of the New Orleans and Nashville Police Departments.

I am honored to host today's National Law Enforcement Summit on Crime in 2017. On behalf of myself and my Co-Chairman, David Brown, I would like to thank our colleagues for travelling across the country to participate in this critical conversation. Thank you also to Nicole Fortier and Inimai Chettiar, for their hard work bringing this Summit together.

As we all know, our nation faces new challenges to public safety. An increase in opioid abuse. An uptick in homicides in some cities. Strained police-community relations. We gather at this Summit today to discuss the best way to address these challenges, drawing on strategies that have worked, without turning to the misguided policies of the past.

Our group, Law Enforcement Leaders, unites over 200 current and former police chiefs, sheriffs, federal and state prosecutors, and attorneys general from all 50 states. We launched two years ago with the purpose of advancing the cause of reducing crime and unnecessary incarceration... together.

I was a police officer for thirty-four years. I know we can do this. And we must. As a conservative and the child of police officers, I passionately believe in this cause.

All of us here today share a central set of values: public safety is utterly critical to the nation we love. Together, the men and women in this room have come to the aid of thousands of victims by identifying, arresting and successfully prosecuting violent criminals. We patrol our streets, make the case in court, and believe there are times when prison is the right thing to do. Crime is down over several decades — way down — and that is something of which we should all be very, very proud.

But we also know police keep our streets safe not by putting more people in prison – but by putting the most dangerous people in prison. As progressive and conservative policymakers work to reform their criminal justice systems, law enforcement must be at the forefront of these efforts. We have been fighting crime on the front line for decades. We are the experts. We know which data-driven and innovative practices actually work. We have been working for years to reduce recidivism and strengthen relationships with our communities. Now is the time to share our lessons.

Today, you will hear from members of Congress, former attorneys general, prominent police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and the leaders of virtually every major law enforcement

association. They will discuss why they are committed to the mission of reducing crime **and** incarceration, what they have been doing to advance that cause, and how we can move forward, together.

In all this, we must be able to rely on our government to support us. That's why the Chairmen and Steering Committee of Law Enforcement Leaders sent a letter to the President and Attorney General this morning, asking them to join the national bipartisan movement for criminal justice reform.

We are grateful to the Trump Administration for prioritizing the cause of fighting crime and violence. For this commitment, we are here to say: thank you.

We greatly appreciate this Administration's unwavering support for law enforcement – the men and women who work each day to protect the citizens of this country. It has consistently supported our mission, and acknowledged the difficulties and dangers of our profession. A White House that backs law enforcement is crucial to our success. We stand ready to work with the White House and Justice Department on constructive policies to advance public safety.

But we are here to say something else, as well. We do not believe that public safety is served by a return to tactics that punish without strong purpose. From decades of experience on the front lines, we have learned first-hand that these responses are ineffective to reduce crime. We cannot incarcerate our way to safety.

Recent federal policy shifts seem to move away from this consensus, and risk repeating mistakes of the past. We believe these changes are misguided and move crime and justice policy in a less effective direction.

Today, we respectfully request that the Administration join the bipartisan effort for criminal justice reform, and align its policy agenda with that mission. Together, we can better protect public safety in a modern and effective way.

In our letter and report today, Law Enforcement Leaders present five commonsense recommendations for discussion to our colleagues, lawmakers, and the public. And we ask the Administration and Congress to champion them. We ask that they:

1. First, ensure that federal funding to local police departments prioritize fighting violent crime without diffusing focus with punishing low-level and nonviolent offenses.
2. Second, champion and sign into law federal sentencing reform, specifically the bipartisan Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act reintroduced a few weeks ago.

3. Third, utilize mental health and drug treatment as the primary response to addiction.
4. Next, bolster local community policing by increasing funding to the COPS Office.
5. And lastly, expand reentry programs to ensure that released prisoners go on to live law-abiding lives instead of returning to crime.

We believe these policies will vastly enhance law enforcement's ability to fight crime effectively. This is our perspective, based on our experiences.

Ultimately, police and prosecutorial practices must evolve to keep up with new challenges. So too must our criminal laws. To help formulate the next generation of crime policies, we can share with one another our concerns and success stories. That is a primary purpose of today's Summit. Today, we will hear from a distinguished group of police, sheriffs, and prosecutors who have travelled from all parts of the country to share their diverse stories. They will share with us the tremendous work they have done and are doing in their jurisdictions. These leaders are implementing new, innovative, and effective strategies that move forward in the fight against crime without increasing unnecessary incarceration. We look forward to learning from their experiences. And we hope that lawmakers, both here in Washington and in states and localities, will listen and learn from us.