EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

In the summer of 2014, Better Together\(^1\) initiated discussions with the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) to conduct a study of the state of policing in the City and County of St. Louis. The August 9, 2014, fatal shooting of Michael Brown by Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson, and the civil unrest that ensued, gave new urgency to this initiative. In September 2014, Better Together and PERF entered into an agreement to conduct this examination and issue a report with recommendations.

PERF is an independent research organization, based in Washington, DC, that focuses on critical issues in policing. PERF identifies best policies and practices on fundamental issues, such as strategies to minimize police use of force; developing community policing and increasing public perceptions of legitimacy and procedural justice in policing; new technologies for improving police accountability, such as body-worn cameras; and civil rights and racial issues in policing.\(^2\)

The purpose of the study is two-fold:

1. To examine how policing services are currently being delivered in St. Louis County/City, assess the state of police-community relations, and compare the status quo with best practices in the policing profession.
2. To provide recommendations for moving forward, including identifying policing models and operational options to improve policing in the region.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

For this study, PERF carried out a variety of research activities:

- **Town Hall Meetings**: Better Together sponsored a series of Town Hall Meetings in various parts of region, including St. Louis City, Bridgeton, Des Peres, University City, unincorporated North County, and unincorporated South County. We heard from hundreds of residents, community leaders, elected representatives, and others who participated in these town halls.

\(^1\) Better Together describes itself as “a grassroots project born in response to growing public interest in the fragmented nature of local government throughout St. Louis City and County, which dates back to 1876, when St. Louis City broke away from St. Louis County.” It is sponsored by the Missouri Council for a Better Economy. [http://www.bettertogetherstl.com/about](http://www.bettertogetherstl.com/about)

\(^2\) See [www.policeforum.org](http://www.policeforum.org). Many of PERF’s reports on these issues are available online at [http://www.policeforum.org/free-online-documents](http://www.policeforum.org/free-online-documents)
Focus groups: We convened targeted focus group meetings, to probe in greater detail the perspectives of different sectors of the community, including municipal government representatives, community leaders, police officials, school administrators, youths, and others.

Interviews: We held individual meetings with key stakeholders, including community leaders, elected representatives, law enforcement officers and executives, police union leaders, legal experts, members of the clergy, news media, and others.

Data collection and analysis: We conducted a wide-ranging data collection and analysis effort that examined population and demographic trends; police department organization, staffing, and costs; and reported crimes and calls for service, where available.

Literature review: We completed an extensive review of prior research, including studies of the municipal courts, the U.S. Department of Justice Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department, other research reports, Missouri State statutes and regulations, and articles by the St. Louis and national news media.

KEY FINDINGS

- **There are high rates of crime in St. Louis City and many cities in St. Louis County.**
- **High crime rates are costly:** The total cost of Part I crime in St. Louis City and County combined—including victim, criminal justice, and community costs—was estimated to exceed $1.5 billion in 2013, or $1,187 for every resident of the city and county.
- **Costs of police services:** The cost of police services in the St. Louis region is $355 per person.
- **Policing is extremely fragmented:** St. Louis County contains a patchwork of police departments, many of which have jurisdiction over very small areas. About one-third of the municipalities in the County that have a police department occupy less than one square mile. This has led to confusion and distrust among residents, who often feel targeted and harassed by police officers and the municipal court system.
- **Fragmentation undermines effective policing:** The fragmentation of policing is inefficient, undermines police operations, and makes it difficult to form effective law enforcement partnerships to combat crime locally and regionally.
- **Many police departments have inappropriate goals:** In many municipalities, policing priorities are driven not by the public safety needs of the community, but rather by the goal of generating large portions of the operating revenue for the local government. This is a grossly inappropriate mission for the police, often carried out at the direction of local elected officials.
- **Community policing is lacking in many cities where it is needed most:** Even though residents consistently say they want their police departments to engage in more community-oriented policing, this approach is de-emphasized or non-existent in many jurisdictions, especially in communities with high levels of crime and deep distrust between residents and police.
• **The “muni shuffle” is unprofessional:** Police standards, training, pay, and professionalism vary dramatically throughout the region. Of particular concern is the so-called “muni shuffle,” in which police officers who are fired or allowed to resign because of disciplinary or performance issues in one department are quickly hired by another department, because it can be less expensive to hire an experienced (albeit compromised) officer than to recruit and train a new officer.

• **Police standards vary dramatically from agency to agency:** Throughout our study, we heard concerns about the lack of standards and consistency from agency to agency in terms of policies, practices, training, and pay. This issue was raised by police professionals, municipal leaders, members of the news media, community leaders, and individual residents. Just one-quarter of the police departments in St. Louis City and County are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) or certified by the Missouri Police Chiefs Charitable Foundation.

• **Concerns about race permeate the justice system:** Race is an issue that permeates almost every aspect of policing and justice in St. Louis City and County. Concerns over racial tensions and racial bias were raised throughout the course of this study, especially by African-Americans and young people. The failure to address the racial issues in policing is holding back progress.

• **These issues are hurting St. Louis:** All of these issues together are undermining the quality of policing services and harming the reputation of St. Louis City and County. The future safety, economic health, and vitality of the region will require not only addressing the immediate problems today, but also creating new approaches and better systems that are recognized as national “best practices.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation #1: Create a regional police training center and conduct joint City-County training exercises.**

We recommend that St. Louis City and County combine their resources to create a single state-of-the-art police training center that would offer basic, in-service, and advanced training for all police officers in the City and County. A combined academy would provide an advanced and forward-looking approach to training and education, tailored to the needs of police officers throughout St. Louis City and County.

**Recommendation #2: Establish a set of regional standards covering critical policies, practices, and operations that will enhance quality and professionalism.**

We recommend reforms in several areas, including the following:

**Hiring standards.** All officers hired by a municipal or County police department should undergo a full psychological screening by a County-approved psychiatrist or psychologist. New hires
should also receive a full background investigation. In addition, departments should use a polygraph (or other comparable test) to detect deception. Finally, all police departments should contact Missouri POST to review the license status and any known disciplinary history of potential hires before making an offer of employment.

**Training standards.** The current state requirement of 48 hours of continuing education over a three-year reporting period is insufficient to maintain and enhance the skills needed for policing excellence. Instead, officers in St. Louis City and County should be required to complete a minimum of 40 hours of in-service training each year.

**Use-of-force policies.** Departments should re-engineer their use-of-force training and adopt model policies that include de-escalation of force whenever possible; requiring officers to intervene if they witness another officer using excessive force; requiring that all use-of-force incidents be recorded on a standard form that will support data collection and analysis; and requiring thorough investigation of all officer-involved shootings, whether or not the subject was hit, seriously injured, or died as a result.

**Recommendation #3: Create a multi-agency Compstat program to identify and analyze cross-border crime problems, and a regional Major Case Squad to combat these problems.**

Compstat is a data-driven performance management system that is used by police departments to reduce crime and achieve other public safety goals. A regional Compstat program would help the police agencies in St. Louis City and County to work together in a proactive way to address these issues of fragmented responses to crime.

We also recommend creation of a regional Major Case Squad to address the crime patterns and repeat offenders uncovered through Compstat. The Major Case Squad would include investigators from multiple jurisdictions.

**Recommendation #4: Provide for cross-deputizing St. Louis City and County police officers, to enhance flexibility and effectiveness in fighting crime.**

Currently, officers in the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department and the St. Louis County Police Department have authority to make arrests in either jurisdiction, but only for violations of state law. City police officers cannot cite or make arrests under County ordinances, and County officers cannot enforce St. Louis City ordinances. This restriction can reduce police effectiveness in combating lower-level crime that would typically be handled at the municipal court level.

**Recommendation #5: Reduce the number of dispatch centers in the County to reduce confusion among residents and promote efficiency.**

The current emergency dispatch system in St. Louis County is fragmented, inefficient, and at times causes confusion among residents. Right now, there are approximately 20 separate public safety answering points (PSAPs) in St. Louis City and County. Two-thirds of these serve only one community. The number of dispatch centers could be reduced through consolidation or contracting of services.
Recommendation #6: Provide additional resources to support the Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) program in its monitoring and oversight roles.

Given widespread concerns over police hiring practices in some communities in St. Louis County—the so-called “muni shuffle”—it is essential that the POST program be adequately funded and staffed to carry out its monitoring, oversight, and investigative roles.

Recommendation #7: The Macks Creek law should be strengthened and enforced more vigorously.

While well-intentioned, the Macks Creek law has not been meaningfully enforced on a consistent basis. Six agencies were in violation of the law in 2013; 26 municipalities exceeded 15% of general revenue; and 40 exceeded 10%. As this report was being finalized, the Missouri House and Senate were considering separate bills to strengthen Macks Creek law, including significantly reducing the current 30% cap on court revenue. These efforts are worthy and important, and the bills should be reconciled and enacted into law.

Recommendation #8: Create a Central Data Warehouse about policing in St. Louis City and County that is accessible to police officials and members of the public.

A Central Data Warehouse about policing should be created for St. Louis City and County. The data warehouse would be operated as a joint venture between the governments of the City and County, as the data availability would benefit the region as a whole. Among the data that would be reported and readily available for analysis would be the following:

- Police departments’ operating budgets.
- Organizational information, including staffing levels by rank, gender, and race/ethnicity.
- UCR crime data for Part I and Part II offenses, and UCR arrest data.
- Standardized calls-for-service information, include call type, self-initiated vs. citizen-generated activity, date/time/location, and call disposition.
- Information on all officer-involved shootings. The collection of data on police-involved shootings would give St. Louis City and County a unique opportunity to lead the way nationally on an issue of critical importance at this time.

Recommendation #9: Survey the community on an ongoing basis to measure citizen satisfaction with policing services and to assess progress over time.

We recommend creating a police satisfaction survey that would be available to the public through an online portal. Any citizen who interacts with the police in St. Louis City and County would be able to provide feedback on the services they received and offer suggestions. A number of police agencies nationwide have implemented this type of tool.

Strategic Consolidations of Police Agencies

In an ideal world, consolidating all police agencies would have advantages in terms of ending wasteful duplications of effort, establishing agency-wide standards and best practices, and producing
cost savings. However, the St. Louis region is large and diverse, with different crime problems and priorities, and a number of residents and community leaders we spoke with are satisfied with their police departments and work well with them. Attempting to dismantle current policing structures in these areas would be met with community opposition and undermine productive partnerships that currently exist.

While wholesale mergers of agencies are not recommended, targeted and strategic consolidations could improve the quality of policing in some areas. Therefore, we are recommending that three consolidation clusters be established in St. Louis County.

The communities in each cluster typically have several factors in common: relatively high crime rates, high numbers of low-level arrests and traffic citations, high ratios of officers to resident populations, high numbers of officers per square mile, and high population density. In addition, they are geographically contiguous.

Recommendation #10: Create a consolidation cluster encompassing nine contiguous jurisdictions in the vicinity of University City: Beverly Hills, Hillsdale, Northwoods, Pagedale, Pine Lawn, Uplands Park, Velda City, Velda Village Hills, and Wellston. These jurisdictions would be consolidated into a single police district and merged via contracts with either the St. Louis County Police Department or the highly regarded University City Police Department.

Recommendation #11: Create a consolidation cluster encompassing four contiguous jurisdictions—Berkeley, Calverton Park, Ferguson and Kinloch—that would be consolidated into a single police district and merged via contract with the St. Louis County Police Department.

Recommendation #12: Merge five contiguous municipalities—Bellefontaine Neighbors, Country Club Hills, Flordell Hills, Moline Acres, and Riverview—via contracts into the Jennings Precinct of the St. Louis County Police Department.

Recommendation #13: Non-cluster agencies should implement the recommendations in this report and consider changes to meet community expectations, the Macks Creek Law, and national best practices in policing.

While we recommend three strategic clusters in Recommendations 10-12, problematic departments in St. Louis County are not limited to the areas that would be affected by those recommendations. Numerous municipal police agencies have serious problems that are not included in the cluster models. One area of particular concern is to the west of Lambert International Airport.

Recommendation #14: Focus on breaking down walls and building bridges between the police and communities in the St. Louis region.

Police, with support from elected officials, must take significant steps to build trust and restore relationships with the communities that they serve. This is especially important in the communities that
historically have had a contentious relationship with the police. Police officials must embrace and commit to this new way of policing as a partnership with the community.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to identify best systems for policing across the entire St. Louis City and St. Louis County area, and we studied the entire region. But inevitably we were drawn to the parts of the region that have the highest rates of serious crime, the highest costs of crime, and the most serious disconnects between high crime rates and police priorities.

Our study revealed a complex policing and justice environment that cannot be “fixed” by any one measure, such as consolidating all of the police agencies in the City and County. Our report recommends targeted and strategic consolidations of three clusters of police departments in St. Louis County, as well as broader, region-wide reforms to improve the quality of policing throughout the City and County.

The challenges ahead are daunting. The region as a whole has significant levels of serious and violent crime, and St. Louis City and a number of municipalities in St. Louis County have very high crime rates. The costs of crime in St. Louis City and County are high—in terms of personal hardship for victims as well as financial costs. It is estimated that crime cost each resident of St. Louis City and County $1,187 per year in 2013, for a total exceeding $1.5 billion a year.

The overall response to crime by police is hindered by a number of factors:

- **Fragmentation:** The fragmentation of policing among 60 separate police agencies, many of which are extremely small, causes inefficiencies and uneven delivery of police services to area residents. Small police departments are found in other parts of the United States, and those departments work together in many cases. But the fragmentation in the St. Louis region is extreme. As St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar told us, “It is not realistic for my agency to have close relationships with five dozen different departments.”

- **Weaknesses in policies, training, hiring, and pay levels:** The lack of standards and commonality in policies, training, hiring, and pay levels weakens the professionalism and quality of individual agencies, and undermines public confidence in the police in general.

- **Inappropriate goals:** An inappropriate and misguided mission has been thrust upon the police in many communities: the need to generate large sums of revenue for their city governments. This is not the way that policing is done in the United States. PERF has never before encountered what we have seen in parts of St. Louis County. The role of police is to protect the public and to work with local communities to solve problems of crime and disorder—not to harass residents with absurd systems of fines and penalties, mostly for extremely minor offenses.

- **Racial bias:** Issues of race and racial bias lie at the heart of many of these problems. As revealed in both the statistical data we analyzed and the hundreds of people we spoke with in
Town Hall Meetings, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews, it is predominantly African Americans who are getting caught up in these unfair, improper revenue-driven practices.

These and other issues documented in this report are driving a wedge between police and residents in many communities. They are undermining the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of many residents, community leaders, business leaders, and the news media. And they are preventing the police and residents from working together and cooperatively to prevent crime and respond effectively when residents are victimized by crime.

We also heard that the type of policing being conducted in some parts of the St. Louis region is not what officers want to be doing. Young men and women become police officers because they want to serve their communities and protect them, not because they want to harass the people they are charged with serving. In many communities, good police officers are caught up in a bad system.

Finally, this system is causing severe damage to the reputation of the entire St. Louis region. The failures of the justice system are making it less likely that people nationwide will see the St. Louis area as a healthy, vital, happy place to work and live.

**Despite these challenges—and there are many**—there is a positive, hopeful way of looking at this situation.

St. Louis City and County have endured a continuing crisis of confidence for almost a year now. As difficult and challenging as this year has been, the crisis provides an opportunity to come together and galvanize the will to make reforms.

People generally understand that the status quo is not an option. Most of the people we encountered during this project were frustrated and concerned, and in some cases, angry. But most were not despairing; they had hope for the future. The leaders of St. Louis City and County should share in their hope and seize this opportunity to fix the problems, and make the region’s policing and justice system a national model for reform.

An opportunity exists to create a new, more integrated, regional approach to policing that is modeled on best policies, best practices, and best training and development of officers. Not all of the police agencies in the City and County need to be combined, but there is a great need for police departments to share information, to work together, and to stop functioning as separate agencies unto themselves.

There is also a need and opportunity for private-sector leaders to become more engaged. Business and community leaders have everything at stake in the future of the St. Louis region, so police leaders should think about how they can tap into private-sector assistance, resources, and expertise in such areas as new technologies, human resources, and budgeting.

The future of policing in St. Louis City and County is not just about the police; it is also about the community. Police leaders and community leaders must work together on devising reforms.
Police agencies in St. Louis City and County should aim higher than merely responding to the current crisis. They should aim for developing an unprecedented new state-of-the-art approach to regional policing, in which all agencies work together and work with their communities to address the crime problems and quality of life issues that really matter to the people who live in St. Louis City and St. Louis County.

--End Executive Summary--