



**Consent Decree Monitor Jonathan Aronie's Keynote Remarks At The
Police and Justice Foundation Annual Stakeout For Justice Event
Sheraton Hotel, New Orleans
12 November 2015**

Good afternoon. As the Federal Monitor over the NOPD Consent Decree, I lead a team of police chiefs, professors, lawyers, and others who collectively serve as the eyes and ears of the federal district court judge overseeing the implementation of the Consent Decree.

David and Melanie invited me here to talk a bit about the Consent Decree and what it means for the citizens and police officers of New Orleans. The Consent Decree, however, is 122 pages and 492 paragraphs long. Suffice it to say, I'll be summarizing today.

As you probably know, law enforcement is one of the most highly regulated professions in the U.S. And I say "profession" intentionally. Police officers are part counselor, part lawyer, part doctor, part family therapist, part social worker, and part soldier. They are professionals in every sense of the word.

But policing is not the only regulated profession out there. Doctors certainly are highly regulated. Bankers are highly regulated. Engineers, architects, airline pilots, ship captains -- all highly regulated. And I speak from experience when I say lawyers are highly regulated as well. *In short, professions with great responsibility are subject to great oversight.*

And frankly, as consumers of the services these professionals provide, we should want it no other way.

While I recognize some bemoan the imposition of the Consent Decree and the Monitor's oversight as a curse. And while I know it is in vogue among some to complain that the current hurdles facing NOPD and the City of New Orleans are exacerbated by the Consent Decree. But I am here to tell you that is a load of bunk. There is very little about the Consent Decree that a rational person fairly can take issue with.



At its core, the Consent Decree promotes five simple, unassailable concepts:

- First, the Consent Decree recognizes the citizens of New Orleans and the members of the NOPD want and deserve *clear, sensible policies* that protect the rights of the citizens and help ensure officers return safely to their families at the end of each day.
- Second, the Consent Decree ensures officers receive *effective training* that actually teaches them how to do their jobs in a safe, effective, and non-biased manner -- and that arms them with the knowledge they need to battle the seemingly endless stream of internet misinformation regarding what constitutes good policing.
- Third, the Consent Decree promotes *close and effective supervision* that ensures less experienced officers are supervised by more experienced officers for the protection of the citizens and, importantly, for the protection of the officers themselves. Good supervision ensures the lessons of the quality policies and the effective training actually are finding their way onto the street.
- Fourth, the Consent Decree requires *meaningful discipline* that holds officers -- and, importantly, their managers -- accountable for their actions in a fair, transparent, and non-biased manner.
- And fifth, the Consent Decree demands *transparency* so the citizens of New Orleans and the members of the NOPD themselves can understand what steps their police department is taking to protect them, see what is working and what is not, and make their own assessment of whether the Department is worthy of their trust.

While there certainly are a multitude of other terms and conditions among the 492 paragraphs of the Consent Decree, most are encompassed by these five core principles.

NOPD has been operating under the Consent Decree for two full years now, and while, as some of you know, I was not happy with much of year one,



over the past year, my team and I have seen real, substantive progress in many areas. For example:

- An effective and well-staffed *Compliance Bureau* has been in place for over a year now, and has played a lead role in moving NOPD toward compliance with its obligations under the Consent Decree.
- *New and revised policies* are being rolled out that reflect forward-thinking concepts, national best practices, and a constitutional balance between public safety and civil rights.
- An impressive *Crisis Intervention Team* modeled after a highly successful program in Memphis is in place, and the first class of energetic CIT officers has graduated and is on the streets.
- Notwithstanding the complaints of some, a fully operational and successful *Office of Secondary Employment* was stood up long ago.
- A reformed and effective *Force Investigation Team* is in place and is conducting quality investigations of officer uses of force, as well as uses of force against officers.
- The most robust *body worn camera program* of any major city in the U.S. is in place here and, indeed, was implemented by NOPD on its own in advance of the Consent Decree.

And there have been other successes as well. However, 15 minutes does not give me time to list them all.

Of course, NOPD still has a ways to go in several areas:

- *The Academy*, for example, still needs a lot of attention. The curriculum, lesson plans, instructor evaluations, and even its strategic plan all need work. But we are seeing progress. Courses are being updated. Instructors are being evaluated. Lesson plans, where there remarkably weren't any in the past, are being prepared and



evaluated. And thanks to the help of the NOLA business community, the Academy now is in a beautiful new location.

- The NOPD likewise needs to spend more time focusing on ensuring its officers receive *close and effective supervision*. While our reviews have shown most supervisors want to provide the sort of supervision required by the Consent Decree, many don't. Some don't because they lack the skill and/or training to do so. But more simply lack the time. Fortunately, Superintendent Harrison and his team are working on ways to ensure supervisors have time to actually supervise. Until then, however, this area will remain a concern of ours.
- The NOPD *Officer Assistance and Support* program was rolled out well later than it should have been, and still has a lot of work to do to provide the support officers need and deserve. But we are seeing progress. NOPD brought in an outsider to lead the department and its programs, and, frankly, I can't say enough good things about Ms. Tebo's ideas, energy, and commitment.
- The way the Department *selects its new officers* still has a long way to go to be effective. But here again, some notable progress has been made. Thanks to the New Orleans business community, local HR professionals now sit alongside NOPD supervisors to interview recruits. And, as reflected in our last report, NOPD is in the process of restructuring the entire selection process, including rewriting its outdated multiple choice and written exams.

Now please do not mistake my optimism for naïveté. These gaps reflect critically important issues that must be fixed in a meaningful way. And there are other gaps beyond these. But I am optimistic we will continue seeing progress being made.

Four things fuel my optimism.

- First, is the transformation we have seen in the attitude and commitment of NOPD management toward change. Where the first



year of the Consent Decree was marked by resistance and defensiveness, this past year has been marked by commitment and cooperation. While Superintendent Harrison and I certainly disagree on substantive matters from time to time, he has not given me a single reason to question his or his management team's commitment to transforming the NOPD into a premier law enforcement agency.

- Second, is the desire among most rank and file officers to follow the rules, protect their communities, and restore honor to the NOPD brand. I've spoken to and ridden with hundreds of officers since taking this job, and by far, most want to do the right thing.
- Third, is the support and resources the Department receives from the community. Organizations like the Police and Justice Foundation, civil rights leaders, and the citizens who make their voices heard through our public meetings and other venues, continue to make their time, resources, and ideas available to the NOPD. Whether those voices are supportive or critical, the involvement and dedication has been and will continue to be invaluable.
- Fourth, is something more intangible, but something nonetheless very real. That is the unmistakable resilience of the New Orleans community and the loyalty of that community to the City. As many of you know, I'm a northerner. I am from Boston and my family and I currently live in Washington, D.C. When I was appointed by the court to serve as NOPD monitor, I started reading everything I could get my hands on about New Orleans. To this day, my favorite is a little gem called *Why New Orleans Matters*, by local author Tom Piazza. In his introduction, after invoking the City's history, music, food, art, and culture, Tom writes that one really finds the meaning of New Orleans by "reading between the lines." He says that, ultimately, New Orleans gains its character "from the spirit that is summoned, like a hologram . . . from the people who live here -- those who have chosen to live here and those whose parents and grandparents and ancestors lived here."



Having been a guest in your City now for two years, I understand what Tom means. It's hard not to love New Orleans. And it's hard not to be fully committed to fighting for it.

So, as my 15 minutes tick to an end, let me leave you with this. I admit I have fallen for New Orleans. But I want to be very clear, this love does not make me softer on the NOPD. It makes me harder on the NOPD. Like Superintendent Harrison, I believe the citizens of New Orleans and the officers of the NOPD deserve the best police department possible. And I fully intend to do my part to ensure they get it.

NOPD recently brought in a number of policing experts from across the country to discuss ways in which the Department could better serve the community and its officers. Toward the end of this meeting, one deputy police chief from Maryland who had been through a Consent Decree of his own, turned to Chief Harrison and offered the following observation. He said, "Chief, you are in an enviable position. You can make the New Orleans Police Department into whatever you want it to be. How many of us ever have that opportunity?"

That Deputy Chief was right. While it may not feel like it now, NOPD has a unique opportunity here to decide who it wants to be. And I am honored and humbled to be able to play a role in helping it get there.

Thank you for having me.