

Dear Members of the Durham, NC City Council

I am writing this letter in support of the exchange programs which send American Police Chiefs to Israel for meetings with the Israeli Police. I am the retired Philadelphia police commissioner and Washington, D.C. police chief. I have served in law enforcement for 47 years in three cities; Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia. I am past president of the Major Cities Chiefs Association and the Police Executive Research Forum. I was appointed by President Barack Obama to serve as co-chair of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. I was recently appointed by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf to serve as Chairman of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. It is also important to note that I am African-American.

It has come to my attention that some are making allegations that such exchange programs are racist and designed to terrorize Black and Brown communities. Nothing could be further from the truth. I had the opportunity to participate in one such exchange program while Chief of the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department. I found the program to be extremely valuable. American law enforcement leaders visit Israel to learn how to better protect our country from terror attacks and to recognize potential warning signs. The Israel Police, unfortunately, have enormous hands-on experience in preventing and responding to terror attacks. These exchange programs allow U.S. law enforcement to see first-hand how Israel protects their public transportation system, airports, restaurants, malls, etc. The lessons they have learned enable American Police to better protect our communities and country.

In response to the allegation that these exchange programs help American Police to terrorize Black and Brown communities and erode civil rights, this is simply not true. There are no examples of police executives who have participated in such programs returning from the visit and then directing actions to suppress the rights and liberties of community members. And, it is completely false to allege that these programs, which are designed to better equip American law enforcement officials to prevent terrorism and protect all of our communities, are racist. The issue raised about the so-called militarization of police is entirely unrelated to these exchange programs. These exchange programs, do not teach or encourage unconstitutional or biased policing. American policing faces many challenges; building trust and legitimacy in communities of color, addressing crime and disorder issues and dealing with the very real threat of terrorism. As a profession, we must be prepared to meet those challenges but do so in a manner that protects the constitutional rights of all people. These exchange programs help American policing accomplish that mission. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at charles.h.ramsey@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Charles H. Ramsey
Philadelphia Police Commissioner (ret)