



The voice of Siouxland. Print, online and mobile.

Sioux City Journal

Founded in 1864



A fresher product

Siouxland Floral Collective hopes to benefit local floriculture. BUSINESS B7

Graduation day

See photos from high school commencement ceremonies. LOCAL A6

Mix&match

Personalize with blend of furniture. HOME&GARDEN C1

Sunday, May 28, 2023

WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES

siouxcityjournal.com

A LEE ENTERPRISES SPECIAL REPORT



JESSE BROTHERS, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Officer Alejandra Ortiz-Gonzales, who was born and raised in Sioux City, is a recent addition to the Sioux City Police Department. The late Leo Miller, a former Sioux City police officer, Woodbury County sheriff and state lawmaker, inspired Ortiz-Gonzales to pursue a career in law enforcement.

Biden, McCarthy reach 'agreement in principle'

LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK, ZEKE MILLER AND KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy reached an "agreement in principle" late Saturday as they raced to strike a deal that to limit federal spending and resolve the looming debt crisis ahead of a June 5 deadline, a person familiar with the situation said. A deal would avert a catastrophic U.S. default.

The Democratic president and Republican speaker reached the agreement after the two spoke earlier Saturday evening by phone, said the person, who was speaking on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter. The country and the world have been watching and waiting for a resolution to political stand-off that threatened the U.S. and global economy.

With the outlines of a deal in place, the legislative package could be drafted and shared with lawmakers in time for votes early next week in the House and later in the Senate.

Biden also spoke earlier in the day with Democratic leaders in Congress to discuss the status of the talks, according to three people familiar with the

Please see DEBT LIMIT, Page A4

UNDERREPRESENTED ENFORCEMENT

Sioux City Police seek diversity, but face recruiting challenges

DOLLY A. BUTZ | dbutz@siouxcityjournal.com

SIOUX CITY

Sioux City Police Officer Carolina Ochoa said communicating with Spanish speakers in their native language makes her appear less adversarial to them.

"They seem to be more calm. And, it really reassures them that, 'I'm trying to communicate with you. I'm trying to make you feel less scared.' It's helped a lot," Ochoa said of speaking Spanish, which is her first language.

The Sioux City Police Department hired the 27-year-old, who was born and raised in Sioux City, in August. From the moment she joined the police force, Ochoa said, she has felt welcomed. In mid-March, she was nearing the end of 17 weeks of training, which challenged her physically, mentally and emotionally.

Ochoa is one of 19 female officers on the force and one of seven sworn members who are Hispanic. The SCPD also has five sworn members who are Black and two who are Asian American, according to data obtained by The Journal through a Freedom of Information Act request.

Please see DIVERSITY, Page A7

Are police as diverse as their communities?

KAREN ROBINSON-JACOBS Lee Enterprises Public Service Journalism Team

Nearly three-quarters of more than 100 law enforcement agencies across much of the U.S. don't reflect the racial makeup of their communities, data supplied by the departments to Lee Enterprises shows.

As part of a seven-month investigation by Lee and Type Investigations, agencies were ranked based on the gap between the proportion of officers and leadership in the agency who identify as people of color and the percentage of people of color in the communities they serve.

Of 105 law enforcement agencies that provided demographic data and served "diverse" communities, defined in our research

Please see POLICE, Page A8

Texas House launches historic impeachment proceedings

ACACIA CORONADO, JIM VERTUNO AND JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas' Republican-led House of Representatives launched historic impeachment proceedings against Attorney General Ken Paxton on Saturday as Donald Trump defended the scandal-plagued GOP official from a vote that could lead to his ouster.

The House convened in the afternoon to debate whether to impeach and suspend Paxton over allegations of bribery, abuse of public trust and that he is unfit for office — just some of the accusations that have trailed Texas' top lawyer for most of his three terms.

The hearing sets up what could be a remarkably sudden downfall for one of the GOP's most prominent legal combatants, who in 2020 asked the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn President Joe Biden's electoral defeat of Trump. Only two officials in Texas' nearly 200-year history have been impeached.

Paxton, 60, has called the impeachment proceedings "political theater" based on "hearsay

Please see TEXAS HOUSE, Page A4

GET THE FULL BENEFITS OF YOUR SUBSCRIPTION! **Subscribers:** Activate your digital account to get updated stories, photo galleries, videos, the E-edition and hundreds of additional puzzles, games and comics. Visit siouxcityjournal.com/activate today.

The Mini

Congratulations to the Bishop Heelan Catholic boys and girls soccer teams for qualifying for their respective state tournaments in Des Moines. The boys team plays its opening game Tuesday, while the girls team begins on Wednesday. **JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD**

Weather

Clouds and sun
High 86 • Low 61
FORECAST • A3

Inside

SPORTS	B1	OPINION	A10, A11
LIVING	D1	OBITUARIES	A5, B10, B11, B12
WEATHER	A3	BUSINESS	B7, B8, B9





JESSE BROTHERS PHOTOS, SIoux CITY JOURNAL

Officer Carolina Ochoa is a recent addition to the Sioux City Police Department. Ochoa said being able to speak her first language, Spanish, on the job has helped Spanish-speaking members of the public feel more at ease.

Diversity

From A1

The SCPD was one of the law enforcement agencies in more than a dozen states that submitted information on race and ethnicity of sworn members. The Journal and other newspapers in Lee Enterprises' coverage areas examined the level of representation of people of color in 105 of those departments in areas where at least 10% of the population is made up of people of color.

The gap between people of color on Sioux City's force and in the community is 24.23 percentage points, so it ranks among the least diverse of those departments.

"You want your police department to look like the makeup of your city," Sioux City Community Policing Sgt. Thomas Gill said. "Sioux City is becoming very diverse. There's now over 50 different languages spoken here."

Even though a gap exists between the composition of Sioux City's police force and its population, Monique Scarlett, founder of Unity in the Community, said "leaps and bounds" have been made under Police Chief Rex Mueller's leadership. She said Unity in the Community is working with law enforcement and citizens on rebuilding relationships that have been "broken and fractured over the years."

"Chief Rex Mueller is doing a phenomenal job on being intentional of making sure the police force in recruitment is reflective of the community that we live in," she said. "Especially in their community policing, they are out there building relationships and building rapport, trying to rebuild trust between citizens and law enforcement. Even though our numbers may seem a little low, I applaud his efforts in recruiting in areas that he can and that the city's budget allows."

Disparity exists

Overall, Sioux City's force of 130 full- and part-time sworn personnel is overwhelmingly white, as it was in 2020, the last time The Journal compared U.S. Census data with statistics provided by the police department.

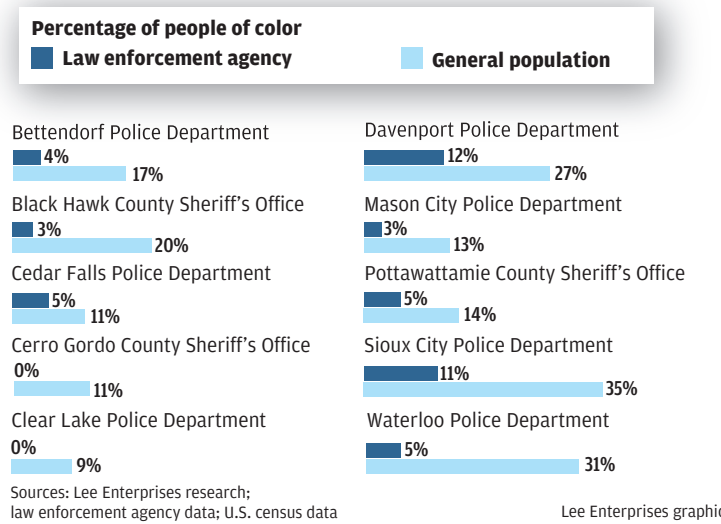
Though whites currently make up 65% of the city's population, they account for 89.2% of its police force. Of the department's 29 sworn members with a rank above patrol officer, just one of them is non-white.

Black people make up 4.8% of Sioux City's population, which is slightly above the department's percentage of Black sworn personnel, 3.8%. The percentage of Asian American representation on the force, 1.5%, trails the city's 3.5%.

The SCPD has zero sworn members who are Native American, although Native Americans make up 2.2% of the city's population. With two reservations nearby

Police diversity in Iowa

Many police departments in the state of Iowa are less diverse than the communities they serve. This chart looks at how diverse Iowa law enforcement agencies are compared to their communities.



Police diversity in Nebraska



dent numbers tend to drop to about 28.

"We lose some over that time. They just decide they want to do something different or, maybe, this isn't what they're after," he said. "There's all kinds of opportunities. You don't just have to become a police officer. You can take advantage of this and use it in a variety of different areas."

Difficult recruiting climate

During a February city operating budget session, Mueller told the City Council about staffing challenges the SCPD is dealing with amid a difficult recruiting climate. He said the department is experiencing "burnouts really heavy," half a dozen injuries and retirements.

"When things like Memphis are happening, that really makes people question coming into this profession, so we need to be very aggressive at bringing the best people to come here and work in Sioux City," Mueller said, referencing the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man. Five former Memphis, Tennessee, police officers, who are also Black, have been charged with second-degree murder in connection with Nichols' death.

Gill said the SCPD recently went before the Civil Service Commission to change its education requirement, which could draw more applicants. Sioux City was the only remaining police department in the Midwest mandating that applicants have at least 60 college credit hours with a "C" or better, according to Gill. Now, they just need a high school diploma or GED equivalent. Gill said the department is also switching from testing applicants, who must be at least 21 and have U.S. citizenship, on an annual basis to every six months.

The department has reached out to Native American leaders in the community in an effort to get more Native Americans to apply to become police officers, according to Gill. He said Eddie Thiphasouk, the SCPD's first Asian American officer who was hired in 2001, attended the Faces of Siouxland Multicultural Fair with Scarlett. The annual event, which was held at the Sioux City Convention Center in March, celebrates the diversity of the community through music, the arts and food.

Scarlett said the country's history of police brutality makes it "extremely difficult" to hire new officers.

"It makes it very challenging for people to say, 'I want to do that' and be at risk every day. I think on the flipside, we have to understand as a community, every officer is not a bad officer," she said. "There's officers that wake up in the morning and they're not saying, 'Oh, I'm just going to go harass a Black person today or a Native person today, just because.' They truly honor their duties to protect and serve."

Fewer applicants

When Gill tested with the SCPD in the mid-'90s, he said, there were 300 officer applicants taking the written test, which, at that time, was biennial and administered before the physical agility test. The number of candidates has dropped off dramatically since then.

According to data provided by the department, 56 individuals applied to become police officers in 2022, but only 38 showed up for testing. Of those who showed up for testing, 13 were candidates of color. Today, the physical agility test is given before the written test.

Dave Drew, administrative program coordinator for Western Iowa Tech Community College's Police Science Technology program, said there's "a push" among law enforcement agencies to hire more women and people of color.

WIT's two-year Police Science Technology program readies students for positions in law enforcement, as well as private security, corrections, juvenile work and private investigations. As a designated Regional Law Enforcement Training Facility, WIT also provides a nine-week continuing education program that prepares students for police officer certification.

Drew, a former Woodbury County sheriff, said the college offered him his current position around the time of George Floyd's death. Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was murdered in Minneapolis by Derek Chauvin, a 44-year-old white police officer, on May 25, 2020.

"Our numbers have not dwindled," Drew said. "I think there was worry that the numbers may go down in the program. Surprisingly, they didn't."

Drew said more female students are pursuing the associate degree. He said he has had several Hispanic students in his classes, as well.

Usually 35 to 38 students are enrolled in the Police Science Technology program's first year, according to Drew. By the program's second year, he said, stu-



Sgt. Tom Gill talks about the hiring requirements for new officers at the Sioux City Police Department in Sioux City, Iowa, Thursday, March 9, 2023.

in Northeast Nebraska, that's the largest percentage of Native Americans among Iowa cities.

Trisha Etringer, a member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska and Siouxland project director for Great Plains Action Society, said she thinks members of the Native American community have "very low interest" in becoming police officers, so "the pool to select from is not the greatest." She said they feel they can best serve their communities by being part of "proactive solutions" rather than police institutions.

The SCPD has made inroads in the hiring of Hispanic officers in recent years. Hispanics account for 5.3% of the force, up from 3.2% in 2020. However, the largest disparity that exists is still between Hispanic sworn personnel and Hispanic community members, because Hispanics make up 20.9% of the city's population.

Alejandra Ortiz-Gonzales, who is Hispanic and among the department's newest officers, said

she has been criticized by some members of minority groups while doing her job.

"They're still going to assume I'm racist because I wear the uniform. You can assume all you want. It doesn't affect the way I perform my job, because I respect everybody," she said.

Ortiz-Gonzales' love of True Crime and her penchant for books about serial killers wasn't what led the 25-year-old to pursue a career in law enforcement. She was inspired by the late Leo Miller, who was a Sioux City police officer, Woodbury County sheriff and state lawmaker.

"He helped my mom out a lot. She's a single mother with eight kids. So, that made me see the good of what law enforcement does for people," said Ortiz-Gonzales, who grew up in poverty in Sioux City. "Regardless that my brother got into trouble, (Miller) still treated us like human beings. It made me really see the good in people like him."



PAT NABONG, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES VIA AP

Police officers stand beside a mural for George Floyd in the Chicago neighborhood of Bronzeville during an anti-police brutality protest. In the past decade, high-profile police killings — including Floyd — have shaken the nation and led to widespread protests and calls for reform, including hiring more nonwhite officers.

Police

From A1

as places where at least 10 percent of the residents are non-white, 76 underrepresented the percentages of people of color in their communities by 10 points or more. Some have gaps of more than 30 percentage points. The largest gap, just more than 43 percentage points, is in Martinsville, Va.

These are among several key observations drawn from data submitted by state and local law enforcement agencies largely in the Midwest and East, near areas where Lee properties are based. The data show that thousands of people of color live in communities where the force looks nothing like them, despite calls for increased law enforcement diversity that echoed through U.S. streets three years ago following the murder of George Floyd.

Twenty of the 105 agencies serving diverse communities have no people of color or only one such person on the force.

Also, in nearly half of the 93 agencies serving diverse communities that gave data on leadership, there were either zero or only one person of color in leadership.

Why police diversity matters

Experts within and outside law enforcement say the continued representation gap — the subject of discussions that go back decades — underscores existential questions about how police “protect and serve” people of color.

A study released in November by the Bureau of Justice Statistics that collected data in 2020 about interactions with police over the previous year showed that Black people were three times more likely than white people — 6 percent vs. 2 percent — to experience the threat of force or use of nonfatal force during their most recent police contact.

The report also showed that during that time frame, Black people had the highest likelihood of experiencing any type of police misconduct (5%), more than double that of white people and Hispanic people combined.

While improving diversity doesn't solve issues like excessive force or biased policing, it



WOODY MARSHALL, GREENSBORO NEWS & RECORD

A memorial to George Floyd in front of the International Civil Rights Center and Museum in Greensboro, N.C., on June 3, 2020.

can begin to cause a shift.

“The more diverse we are as it relates to race and ethnicity, the more diverse we are also in life experiences, which helps agencies to better inform policies, also better inform their training, and better inform their support systems as well,” said Darryl McSwain, chief of the Maryland-National Capital Park Police force and a 2021 finalist for the post of top cop in Lincoln, Nebraska. “So I think that’s why it’s so crucial that we continue to diversify.”

Most agencies surveyed underrepresent communities of color

The Lee/Type law enforcement project is an update and expansion of a similar effort launched in the Midwest in the summer of 2020 as the nation was reeling from weeks of protests after Derek Chauvin, a white then-police officer in

Minneapolis, pressed his knee to the neck of Floyd for more than 9 minutes, according to prosecutors who won a murder conviction against Chauvin.

For the current effort, police and sheriff's departments along with state patrols in 14 states responded to a two-page survey seeking data on topics including the demographic breakdown of the sworn personnel and leadership of the departments, the use of body and dashboard cameras, and the number of racial profiling and excessive force complaints.

Nearly 120 agencies provided demographic information on race and ethnicity. Most also provided information on the gender breakdown of the department. In 14 of the communities, people of color — identifying as Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American/First Nation and Asian American/Pacific Islander — made up less than 10 percent of the popula-



WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL FILE PHOTO

Youth organizers amp up protesters on the Capitol Square in Madison during an entirely peaceful nighttime demonstration June 2, 2020.



JULIO CORTEZ, AP FILE

The site where George Floyd was killed by then-Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin is shown June 24, 2021, in Minneapolis.

tion served. Not surprisingly, the law enforcement agencies there were all or largely white.

For the purposes of this research, Lee focused largely on the 105 agencies serving areas with at least 10 percent people of color (based on 2020 U.S. Census data):

Seventy-six of the 105 agencies, or about 72 percent, underrepresented their communities of color by 10 percentage points or more. In Martinsville, Virginia, more than half of the community — roughly 57 percent — was composed of people of color in the 2020 census, while people of color accounted for almost 14 percent of the force. The largest agency to respond to the survey was the 4,741-member New York State Police. People of color make up about 45 percent of the population in the department's jurisdiction and 12 percent of the force — a gap of 33 percentage points.

Twenty-eight departments came within 10 percentage points of matching the diversity levels of their communities. They range in size from the seven-member Hebron Police Department in Indiana to the 488-member police department in Madison, Wisconsin.

In Hebron, about 12 percent of the population and 14 percent of the force are people of color. In Wisconsin's capital, 28 percent of the community and 23 percent of the force are made up of people of color.

In another agency, Henrico County Sheriff's Office in Virginia, people of color make up 49 percent of the population and about 68 percent of the force for an over-representation of nearly 20 percentage points.

As a group, the 119 agencies — police departments, sheriff's

offices and state police — that supplied diversity data appear to skew whiter than local law enforcement across the U.S. overall. This is based on part- and full-time personnel numbers provided by the 119 agencies compared with the latest law enforcement demographics for full-time personnel collected by the Department of Justice in 2020.

In the 82 police departments in the group, nearly 79 percent of sworn members identified as white versus about 69 percent of full-time sworn officers in local police departments in 2020.

Lee found similar disparities among the 31 sheriff's departments in the group. Eighty-seven percent of sworn members identified as white, 16 percentage points greater than the roughly 71 percent of full-time sworn officers in sheriff's departments nationwide who identified as white in 2020, according to the DOJ.

So what do all these numbers mean?

In Martinsville, Virginia, which describes itself as a “city without limits,” the lack of diversity on its police force has not gone unnoticed. In its response to the survey last fall, the department told Lee that it has four Black officers and one Hispanic officer on a force of 37 officers.

“I certainly do acknowledge the gap,” said Maj. Chad Rhoads, part of the department's leadership team. “It's certainly not representative of the community, but we want to get it there. But it's just something that we've always struggled with.”

Why and how we're covering this topic

In the summer of 2020, as the nation was reeling from weeks of protests following the murder of George Floyd, Lee newspapers in the Midwest launched a project looking at diversity in local law enforcement and camera usage. The team received data from about 65 law enforcement agencies.

For 2023, Lee, along with Type Investigations, a nonprofit newsroom, expanded the project to include departments in more sections of the country. Reporters reached out to more than 170 agencies that are in or near Lee newspaper coverage areas. The agencies are largely in the Midwest and East. We received 146 responses.

We asked for, among other items, data on racial, ethnic and gender diversity of the sworn members of the agency, racial and ethnic diversity of leadership, usage of and the policies surrounding body worn cameras and dash cameras and complaints to the agencies about excessive use of force and racial profiling.

Some agencies noted that they do not ask members to identify their race, ethnicity or gender. In those cases the demographic information given represents the best estimate of agency leadership.

We compared the proportion of people of color in the area under the agency's jurisdiction, based

on Census data, to the percent of people of color on the force to determine which departments were more representative of their communities.

For complaints, some agencies listed all that came in and made a note of which ones they determined to be valid. Some listed all “use of force” incidents and did not specify which ones were allegedly excessive use of force. Some agencies use the broad term “biased policing,” which goes beyond alleged bias based on race.

Even with the caveats, the data provides a telling snapshot of law enforcement for thousands of Lee readers.



BEBETO MATTHEWS, AP FILE

New York City Police Academy graduates sit in formation with white gloved hands on their legs during a graduation ceremony.

Police

From A8

Rhoads said the department tried attending job fairs at nearby historically Black colleges and universities but got no applicants, which he said has happened at college job fairs in general. He said the department does not have a specific program to recruit people of color. It relies on “grassroots” efforts including using school resource officers to forge connections with students.

Of course, Martinsville is far from the only city with a force that does not reflect the population. Sgt. Betsy Brantner Smith, a police trainer and spokesperson for the National Police Association, an educational and advocacy group, links the quest for diversity to law enforcement’s challenge of attracting applicants overall.

“Since 2020, American law enforcement, we, have (had) a very difficult time just recruiting and retaining police officers of any race and any gender,” said Brantner Smith, who was a police officer for 29 years beginning in 1980. “So right now, as a country ... we’re just trying to get people to come to the law enforcement profession. People are leaving in record numbers. They are leaving prior to receiving their retirement, and it’s becoming a real crisis.”

Departments are increasing their use of technology and social media and beginning to recruit more broadly to boost ranks, Brantner Smith said, but “whether we’re talking post-George Floyd or we’re talking in general, not everyone is attracted to this profession.”

Call for police diversity reaches zenith after George Floyd’s death

Long before Floyd’s murder sent thousands of protesters into the streets, community activists and private citizens had called for a more just and representative law enforcement system.

That chorus reached a crescendo after Floyd’s Memorial Day 2020 murder and included a “21 pillar” proposal outlined in 2021 by the National Urban League, which, among other demands, called on communities and law enforcement leadership to “increase diversity and equity in both the leadership and ranks of local, state and federal law enforcement.”

Most law enforcement leaders and experts interviewed for this story listed similar reasons to push for more diversity in police forces, including helping to establish better relations with diverse communities and having role models who can attract other diverse candidates.

“If we want to have a rela-



ASHLEY LANDIS, AP FILE

A demonstrator confronts a police officer June 2, 2020, in the Venice Beach area of Los Angeles during a protest over the death of George Floyd.

tionship with our community, and we want our community to be a part of this ecosystem of public safety, then we want our police force to be reflective of the communities that we’re in,” said Regina Holloway, vice president of community impact for Axon, maker of equipment for law enforcement, notably Tasers and cameras.

“I think it’s not impossible by any stretch. We want all officers to be equitable across the board, but I do think that there’s this opportunity for an officer of color — a Black officer, a brown officer — to have lived experience that they can relate to community members that are having challenges around public safety, challenges in the community, right? There’s going to be a kinship there, possibly, that will create a deeper relationship at the on-site of that interaction.”

She referred to a study of the Chicago Police Department, published in Science magazine, examining data on officer demographics and behavior from 2012-2015 that found that when compared with white officers, Black and Hispanic officers made far fewer stops and arrests and used force less often, especially against Black civilians.

“What we know is that Black and brown officers are less likely to stop people for low-level offenses,” Holloway added. “And they’re less likely to have sort of these negative interactions with community.”

High-profile deaths in 2023 fuel debate over ‘biased culture’

That assertion fueled major debates earlier this year in two highly publicized deaths of Black citizens following interactions with law enforcement members, most of whom were people of color.

In late April, the family of Tyre Nichols filed a \$550 million federal lawsuit against the city of Memphis, the city’s police department, and what the suit described as “unqualified,

untrained and unsupervised” officers who severely beat the 29-year-old Black man after a traffic stop and brief foot chase Jan. 7, according to news reports and video that was later shared with the public. He was hospitalized and died three days later.

Five former Memphis police officers — all Black — were fired within weeks of the incident. Each faces multiple charges, including second-degree murder, aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping, official misconduct and official oppression, according to news reports.

In Virginia, in a death that conjured images of Floyd pinned beneath Chauvin’s knee, Henrico County deputy sheriffs piled onto Irvo Otieno, a 28-year-old Black man in shackles suffering a mental health crisis, as he was being admitted to Central State Hospital. He died of asphyxiation, a medical examiner found.

Otieno, whose family said he had been diagnosed as having bipolar disorder, died March 6 while in custody of the Henrico County Sheriff’s Office.

Hospital video shows the group pinning him down for close to 12 minutes, and there’s no audio. The sheriff’s office told Lee it does not use body cameras.

Of the seven sheriff’s deputies charged with second-degree murder in the case, five are Black, two are white.

In the Nichols case, Benjamin Crump, a noted civil rights attorney representing the Nichols family, told ABC News he believes Nichols was a victim of an “implicit bias police culture that exists in America.” Crump said Nichols’s death occurred despite police reform in Memphis in recent years because of “the institutionalized police culture that makes it somehow allowed that they can use this type of excessive force and brutality against people of color. And it doesn’t matter if the officers are Black, Hispanic, or white. It’s part of the culture, this biased culture that said this is allowed.”

Leaders want professionalism, trust and studies into police diversity

Attempts to steer departmental culture in a more inclusive direction often fall to the chief or sheriff. It can be a daunting task regardless of their ethnicity.

Jamal A. Simington, chief of the Bloomington Police Department in Illinois, identifies as African American and is the only person of color in leadership in his 123-member department, with less than 10 percent of the force composed of people of color. That’s in a community where 27 percent of residents are people of color.

Simington, who said he has been called the N-word and Uncle Tom, thinks leaders must foster and model a culture of professionalism regardless of race.

“You need the representation with high levels of professionalism,” said Simington, who was drawn to law enforcement by family members who served. When asked about the roles of officers of color in the deaths of Otieno and Nichols, Simington said, “It does reflect horrible on the badge. It tarnishes everything we stand for, right? It’s supposed to be a noble occupation. So the nobility comes from our capability and our mindset on how to treat people (in a way that’s) fair and appropriate. That’s if you’re a person of color or not.”

The latest report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics on encounters with police did not list the race of the officers involved.

A database by the Washington Post tracking fatal police shootings since 2015 shows that Black Americans, who account for about 14 percent of the population, are killed by police at more than twice the rate of white Americans. The database also does not list the race of officers.

The Lee survey asked agencies to share numbers for excessive force and racial profiling complaints logged between 2017 and 2022. More than 100 responded. Some declined to provide data or suggested other sources for it. Thirty-nine agencies surveyed said they had no complaints fitting in either category in any of those years. There is also variation in how each agency categorizes complaints. Some responded with numbers for allegations described in broader terms such as “biased policing” and “use of force.”

The Greensboro Police Department in North Carolina, which is nearly 70 percent white in a community that is less than 40 percent white, had 121 “biased-based policing” allegations, including bias other

than race, between 2017 and 2022. It also had 14 allegations of excessive force during that same period. Allegations are not always sustained by the department once investigated. In an email, the department said its investigations found that three of four allegations of excessive force were found to be valid in 2021-22, and no allegations of biased policing initiated by citizens were sustained in that period.

Stephanie Mardis is captain of the Greensboro Police Department’s Professional Standards Division, which handles matters related to internal affairs. She told Lee she recognizes the need for improving diversity in the department’s ranks.

Having a force that was more representative of the community “may not necessarily mean that our complaints will decrease,” she said. “It may not necessarily mean that we will have less use of force, but on its face, if a police department reflects the community in itself, it inherently gains trust with people from all walks of life.”

The department gives the public access each year to its complaint numbers via an annual report; however, it does not list the race or ethnicity of the officer.

Dr. Tracie L. Keesee is COO, president and co-founder of the Center for Policing Equity, which uses data and science to help law enforcement look at “harm reduction when it comes to issues of race” and reimagine “public safety in a way that centers community.”

She feels there should be more robust, peer-reviewed studies that look closely at the differences in negative outcomes for people of color when interacting with diverse vs. non-diverse departments.

“The science is so scant,” she said. “What we do know is that diversity is important because you do know that it brings you different types of perspectives.”

For starters, Keesee said, law enforcement agencies need to better track both the diversity of their members and how they interact with citizens. “We want law enforcement departments to start collecting data appropriately, and we want to make it available to everyone so we can do exactly what you’re talking about,” she added. “So we can look at and be able to try to begin to answer those questions.”

Lee Enterprises reporters Alison Burdo, Lauren Cross, Lizzie Kaboski, Analisa Trofimuk and Patrick Wilson contributed to this report. Research by Emma Davis, Type Investigations. Karen Robinson-Jacobs is a member of the Lee Public Service Journalism team and a Type Investigations fellow.