



U. S. Department of Justice


Office of the Deputy Attorney General

The Deputy Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530

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MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DEPARTMENT LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENTS AND PROSECUTORS

FROM: Sally Q. Yates 
Deputy Attorney General

SUBJECT: Implicit Bias Training

Later today, the Justice Department will announce a new “implicit bias” training program for its law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and other personnel. I’d like to briefly explain why we are doing this training and why I think the effort is so essential to the mission of our Department.

Over the past several decades, social science research has revealed that we all experience some degree of “implicit bias,” the unconscious and often subtle associations we make between groups of people and stereotypes about those groups. This phenomenon is distinct from “explicit bias,” the overt prejudice that most people think of when we talk about racism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry. To some extent, implicit bias is part of human nature; a byproduct of our diverse, multicultural society. But implicit bias also presents unique challenges to effective law enforcement, because it can alter where investigators and prosecutors look for evidence and how they analyze it without their awareness or ability to compensate. The good news is that research suggests the vast majority of people can counter these effects if they are aware of which biases they possess—and are trained to recognize when they creep into their reasoning or situational awareness.

In recent years, state and local law enforcement agencies across the country have integrated implicit bias education into their training programs, often with financial support from the Department’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). These trainings serve several purposes. They help officers better understand how unconscious and unintentional biases can affect their work. They reinforce the qualities that so many great investigators and attorneys already possess, including an ability to look past extraneous information, a willingness to question one’s core assumptions, and a relentless focus on finding those responsible for crimes

even in complicated operational environments. And perhaps most importantly, these trainings reaffirm our commitment to a criminal justice system that is fair, impartial, and procedurally just. With implicit bias training, agencies across the country have taken an important step towards strengthening the relationship between law enforcement and the communities we serve.

For several years, agencies and offices across the Department have sought ways to raise awareness of implicit bias in their day-to-day work. Today's announcement marks the beginning of our comprehensive effort to train the Department personnel who have the most direct involvement in our criminal justice system. In the coming weeks, the Department will begin providing implicit bias training to the more than 23,000 agents serving our four law enforcement agencies and approximately 5,800 attorneys across our 94 U.S. Attorney's Offices. In a later stage of the process, we will expand the training to Office of the Inspector General agents and all criminal prosecutors in the Department's other litigating components. These trainings, based on the latest scientific research, will be tailored to your agency and to the type of work you do, recognizing, for example, that implicit bias can manifest itself differently for a line agent handling drug cases and a supervisory AUSA involved in hiring and promotion decisions.

I know that your time is valuable, and that you already devote many hours to various training requirements, but I would not have asked you to take on this additional responsibility unless I and other Department leaders were convinced of its value. As a sign of our commitment, the Department's very first training will take place tomorrow morning, which will include not just me and my senior staff, but also the leadership of our law enforcement agencies, including the heads of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, and the U.S. Marshals Service.

In the near future, you will receive additional details from your component regarding the training schedule. It is my sincere hope that you find the trainings as worthwhile as so many other law enforcement officers already have.

Thank you, as always, for your tremendous work and your unceasing commitment to the cause of justice.