**We must embrace ways to support both law enforcement and minorities**

**Written by**

*Eva Guzman, Contributor*

Tragedies involving law enforcement and private citizens are escalating racial strife, compelling us to unite to improve police and community relations. Conflict and violence imperil our society, and in this moment, we are being tested in new ways. How we respond to this crisis reflects on who we are, individually and as a nation.

The virtues and values that define the American spirit often blossom in times of sorrow, perhaps because adversity spurs us to embrace the possibilities that lie beyond our trials. Today, as we struggle to make sense of the senseless, we must not lose sight of the opportunity to grow from this crisis. In this moment of truth, Texas judges, as guardians of our justice system, are taking action to strengthen the relationship between communities and the courts.

On December 14, the Supreme Court of Texas and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals will welcome law enforcement officials, public servants and community leaders for a day of discourse with the judiciary. The agenda includes community engagement, disproportionality and disparities, and data integrity. The immediate objective of the Law, Justice, and Communities Summit is to foster collaboration. The ultimate goal is to find solutions for enhancing the public's trust in our justice system.

A credible justice system is fundamental to the promise of justice for all. But a recent survey from the National Center for State Courts reflects a strong public perception that some people do not receive fair treatment in our courts. A troubling survey statistic reveals that only 32 percent of black Americans believe state courts provide equal justice to all.

The summit provides a forum for perspectives on the role unconscious bias plays in our courts. Though the topic is uncomfortable, confronting unconscious bias is essential to ensuring justice is administered evenly. Fairness in the judicial system is not just an ideal, it's an imperative. As Martin Luther King so eloquently admonished, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Disparate views about the rising tensions between law enforcement and communities of color are shaped by the unique experiences of a diverse citizenry. My perspective is born of my own uncommon life experiences as the child of impoverished immigrants, the wife of a police officer, and a judge for more than 16 years.

In the many roles I have fulfilled, I have learned that vulnerability and powerlessness adversely impact families and communities. As the spouse of a 37-year veteran of the Houston Police Department, I have also witnessed the commitment and sacrifice of those who risk their lives to protect others, and I know all too well the anxiety law enforcement families experience when their loved ones serve on the front lines.

My viewpoint derives from a life lived at these disparate angles, and my experiences have taught me that communication is the genesis of understanding and the bedfellow of change. Sharing our stories and experiences and truly listening to one another allow us to step out of our insular communities and into broader relationships.

While our life experiences necessarily inform perceptions of our justice system, they do not limit our potential to transform it. To move forward in these turbulent times, we must start by rejecting the idea that supporting law enforcement and supporting communities of color are mutually exclusive endeavors. We must bring fresh eyes and ears to old problems, and we must approach the task with humility, openness and a shared resolve to make listening everyone's chief objective.

*Eva Guzman is a justice on the Supreme Court of Texas.*