

**FBI Director Christopher A. Wray**  
**National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives**  
**Annual Conference**  
**Houston, Texas**  
**April 13, 2023**

Thanks to all of you for inviting me to join you this morning. I always appreciate the invitation to speak to law enforcement groups, but I'm especially grateful for this one. The FBI's partnership with NAWLEE is among our most vital. That's why we've set up a direct relationship between your organization and our Office of Partner Engagement and have a dedicated point of contact, Erica Pratcher, who works with NAWLEE to advance our common goals. So, I'm grateful for this opportunity to speak at your annual conference for the first time.

Unfortunately, at times, my engagement with law enforcement leaders like you happens during far different — and heartbreaking — circumstances. When I started as FBI Director, I made a commitment to myself that I was going to call the chief or sheriff of every officer murdered in the line of duty. I've now made more than 300 of those calls.

Sadly, one of the most recent was to Memphis, Tennessee, Police Chief C.J. Davis, who I believe is here with us this morning. Chief Davis and I first met a few years ago, back when she was president of NOBLE<sup>1</sup> and with the Durham, North Carolina, Police Department. But I put in a call to her just about a month and a half ago after one of her officers, Geoffrey Redd — a 15-year veteran of the Memphis force — was shot and killed while responding to a trespassing complaint at a local library.

That call — all my calls — are stark reminders of the dangers our people face every day. Of the families and friends who've lost people they love. Of the children who have to grow up without parents. Of the communities deprived of their public servants. And of the great sacrifice that all those in law enforcement are willing to make to protect others each and every day. Chief Davis, I'm glad to be with you today under far less difficult circumstances. And to all of you in this room, I want to thank you for making the choice to devote yourselves to public service.

I've been looking forward to being here with you this morning for quite some time. Since last October, actually, when I had the chance to join you for NAWLEE's breakfast meeting in Dallas during IACP weekend. That, too, was a great opportunity to speak to this important group of partners, but it was an even better opportunity to listen. To hear the stories of so many women in leadership throughout law enforcement. To hear the challenges they've faced. And to hear the principles that have driven them. Principles like the ones that make up your mission: *lead, inspire, mentor*. So today, I'd like to talk a little bit about what those principles mean to me and to the FBI — and to share a few stories of ours, too.

### **Need For More Women in Law Enforcement**

I know I don't need to tell anybody in this room that we need more women in law enforcement across all levels. But I do think it's important for the Director of the FBI to say it out loud and to

say it as often as possible. After all, we're the nation's lead federal law enforcement organization, and yet, for decades, we weren't exactly a model of gender equity.

For many years, far too many years, the Bureau excluded women outright from certain positions within our ranks, including special agent jobs and leadership roles. I'd like to share part of a letter with you, dated April 16, 1971. The letter is addressed to Miss Nancy McRae, and it says:

I was glad to learn from your letter that you are interested in a career in the FBI.<sup>2</sup> Because of the nature of the duties our special agents are called upon to perform, we do not employ women in this position. We must have agents who are qualified to cope with any situation they may face. As you will see, however, women do hold many important positions in this Bureau. Sincerely yours, John Edgar Hoover, Director.

I don't think any speaker ever hopes to get booed by an audience, but I wouldn't really mind it there.

What I know — what everybody in this room knows — what Director Hoover evidently didn't know or, at least, acknowledge — is that women are absolutely essential to effective law enforcement. The threats we're up against today are more complex and more severe than we've ever seen. To stay ahead of them, we need everybody's experience, everybody's knowledge, everybody's specialized expertise.

We've all got to bring our very best ideas to the table and have our best leaders in the room. The more diverse our teams are, the better the solutions we'll come up with — and the greater impact we'll make on the threats and the problems we're all facing. And I mean diversity in everything: age, background, disability status, expertise, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and, of course, diversity in gender. It's all important because everything about who we are shapes the way we think. In law enforcement, that diversity of experience, background, and thought makes for stronger, smarter teams.

But it's not just that. There's also a wealth of research that points to more nonviolent resolutions when women are involved. This research tells us that women are less likely to use excessive force. That they're more likely to implement community-oriented policing. And it stands to reason that increasing the number of women in policing would lead to an improved response to violence against women throughout our communities. And that it would reduce the sexual harassment and discrimination I know many women still encounter, even today, throughout law enforcement.<sup>3</sup> Simply put, more women in law enforcement means better outcomes for us all — those we do the work for and those we do the work with.

### **Leading Through the 30x30 Initiative**

So that brings me to NAWLEE's first guiding principle: leading. Leading is where I think the FBI, in particular, can play an important role, especially when it comes to addressing the underrepresentation of women throughout law enforcement. I told you in October that we'd be committing to 30x30, and we have, not only because of the undeniable benefits our own organization will see from it but also because it's our responsibility as the nation's premier federal law enforcement organization to lead by example.

I'm proud to say that even before we signed the pledge last year, we'd made a lot of progress, and our organization looks a lot different today from the one that sent Nancy McRae that letter in 1971. Today, more than 3,200 women serve as FBI special agents across the country and around the world. In total, our law enforcement officers, which include special agents as well as FBI police, are 23% women — close to double the percentage of sworn female law enforcement officers across the nation. At the Bureau, these women work alongside more than 12,000 other women who serve as analysts, forensic accountants, scientists, IT specialists, and the list goes on and on. And we've made real progress when it comes to women in senior leadership, too.

But I'd like to see us do better, and I know we can. One way is by being a leader among 30x30 participants. In addition to committing to the initiative's goal of seeing women make up 30% of new recruit classes by 2030, we'll also continue to focus on recruiting, hiring, developing, and retaining women in law enforcement positions across our organization.

At the FBI, our new special agent classes have already been trending over 30% women since 2021 — in fact, I did an agent graduation just this week where the class was about 40% women, and that's not unusual now. But we're still championing the initiative because as law enforcement leaders, we should be. And it lets us showcase for others the positive impact of reaching that 30% threshold, including seeing women from our recruiting classes grow into leadership roles throughout the Bureau. We're reviewing our policies and procedures to make sure all our agents have access to promotion opportunities and ensuring we prioritize equity and fairness across all our operations.

We see 30x30 as a valuable opportunity to examine how we can make our culture — our policies, our procedures, and our best practices — better than ever to support women in law enforcement. We're also going into it with our eyes wide open. We know this kind of institutional improvement is more of a marathon than a sprint, and we're in it for the long haul.

### **Inspiring Through Our History and Stories**

This brings me to NAWLEE's second guiding principle: inspiring. Last year, the Bureau marked what I'd say is a pretty inspirational anniversary — 50 years since the first women became special agents in the modern FBI. Fifty years since the FBI changed course and the leadership of the time acknowledged we needed women among our law enforcement ranks and that they deserved to be there. Fifty years since Joanne Misko and Susan Malone completed their training at the FBI Academy at Quantico and were sworn in as FBI special agents. Fifty years of progress.

Reaching that milestone was a big deal for us. As part of the celebration, we published a series of video interviews featuring many of the women who broke down barriers within the FBI. The stories they told were powerful, and they spoke to me — to everyone — about how far the Bureau has come.

I think, for instance, about the stories Kathleen McChesney shared. Kathleen spent 24 years as a special agent, and in that time, she achieved a lot of FBI firsts. She was the first woman to be a supervisory agent in our Los Angeles office. In fact, she was one of the first women to be a supervisory agent in any of our offices. She moved up to lead the Chicago Field Office and then

the Training Division. And she eventually became the first woman to hold the rank of executive assistant director, over what was then our Law Enforcement Services Branch.

But what Kathleen wanted to talk about during her interview wasn't the lofty titles she'd held. It was the time she'd spent early on in her career, working undercover. Back then, she was the only woman in the undercover unit — one of just a few in any Headquarters division — and she said she felt a bit like a novelty. For some, that would be, understandably, pretty intimidating.

But Kathleen said time and again, she took traditional — and misguided — expectations for women and used them to her advantage. Like when she was investigating a kidnapping, and the suspect was holed up in a hotel room. Her team was puzzling over the best way to get into the room without resorting to extreme measures, but Kathleen knew exactly what to do. She just knocked on the door. When the suspect answered, she told him she was the maid, there for turndown service. He let her right in, followed closely by her team behind her, and he was arrested on the spot.

Today, nearly 1,000 women work as covert employees throughout the FBI, supporting more than 3,000 active cases. And while most of them probably aren't investigating kidnappers with some pretty sexist ideas of gender roles, you can be sure they're using all their unique skills, abilities, and experiences to help us protect the American people.

Kathleen's story and so many more like hers demonstrate just how far we've come. But what moves me most is that these stories are an inspiration not just for the many women who have followed in their footsteps but for all the employees of the FBI. Or, as Kathleen put it:

You hope that when you're in a position, whether it's as a special agent investigator, or as a first-line supervisor, or even at the executive assistant director level ... you hope that the kinds of things that you do in your job are good modeling experiences for everyone — man or woman.

### **Mentoring the Next Generation of Women Leaders**

Taking Kathleen's words a step further, we at the Bureau know we have a responsibility to more than just our own organization and the people we serve. We also have a responsibility to the greater law enforcement community. That brings me to your third guiding principle: mentoring.

Mentorship is a top priority for the FBI, too. One way we carry it out is through the National Academy. Since 1935, our National Academy has been training senior law enforcement officers who have proven themselves as leaders within their organizations. It's been a place where the best and brightest among us have forged lasting connections that strengthen law enforcement partnerships around the world.

But we didn't open our National Academy doors to women until 1972 — the same year they entered new agent training at Quantico. That year, we welcomed Ann Schrader of the Virgin Islands Police Department and NYPD Deputy Inspector Vittoria Renzullo. Incidentally, Vittoria won her NA class's J. Edgar Hoover Award for highest academic average while she was at Quantico, really showing Director Hoover what qualifications look like after all. Then, four years later, she went on to become the first woman to command an NYPD precinct.

More than 1,000<sup>4</sup> talented women have graduated from the National Academy in the last 20 years alone. Many of you here today, in fact, including Chief Davis, who I'll call out once again — she graduated in 2014. And our National Academy Unit at Quantico is now under the leadership of Sherie Rebollo, one of the first women to run it. She and her team make sure there's always at least one woman serving as a counselor for each class, and they encourage every cohort's women to meet periodically throughout their stay to discuss challenges, opportunities, and best practices.

These days, women make up about 9% of each National Academy class. That's progress from 1972, but we can and need to do better. We need more women in leadership positions throughout law enforcement. And if you don't mind me saying, having National Academy on your résumé certainly helps when you're up for a promotion. So, this is one of the many ways we at the Bureau are working to ensure women have the same opportunities as men, to learn together and to build relationships with their colleagues across the United States and overseas.

What I'd love to see is a National Academy class made up of 30% women somewhere not too far down the road. That's an idea Kym<sup>5</sup> recently came to us with, and I think it's a great one. We're already hard at work trying to make that happen. And I expect every ADIC and SAC in the Bureau to work with their partners to prioritize nominating women for National Academy spots.

## **Conclusion**

I know the FBI and the larger law enforcement community still have a way to go when it comes to true gender equity. But when I think about where the FBI was half a century ago and where we are today, I can't help but be proud of how far we've come. In fact, every day, I'm reminded of it.

Just a few doors down from my office is that of my executive special assistant, the most senior agent on my staff, an agent named Sho Sinha. She's got Nancy McRae's letter taped to her door. And underneath Director Hoover's signature, two more people recently signed their names to this vestige of history: Joanne Misko and Susan Malone, our first two women agents 50 years ago. Now, that's progress. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives.

<sup>2</sup> The sentence has been abbreviated in two spots for brevity. The full original text reads, “I was glad to learn from your letter *received on April 13th* that you are interested in a career in the FBI and enclosed are publications regarding the opportunities available and requirements for employment with us.”

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from conclusions drawn in Kim Lonsway et al., *Hiring & Retaining More Women: The Advantages to Law Enforcement Agencies* (Arlington, VA: National Center for Women & Policing, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Since 2005, when TD began tracking gender as an attribute, 1,344 women have graduated from the FBI National Academy.

<sup>5</sup> Kym Craven, NAWLEE executive director.