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Department of Justice Announces New Department-Wide Implicit Bias Training for Personnel

The Department of Justice announced today that it will train all of its law enforcement agents and prosecutors to recognize and address implicit bias as part of its regular training curricula. The new training, based on the latest social science research and best practices in law enforcement, will begin across the department in the next few weeks. Deputy Attorney General Sally Q. Yates sent a memo to all law enforcement agents and prosecutors today informing them of the new Implicit Bias Training Program and its importance to a strong and fair criminal justice system.

“Our officers are more effective and our communities are more secure when law enforcement has the tools and training they need to address today’s public safety challenges,” said Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch. “At the Department of Justice, we are committed to ensuring that our own personnel are well trained in the core principles and best practices of community policing. Today’s announcement is an important step in our ongoing efforts to promote fairness, eliminate bias and build the stronger, safer, more just society that all Americans deserve.”

“The Department of Justice has a responsibility to do everything we can to ensure that our criminal justice system is fair and impartial,” said Deputy Attorney General Yates. “Given that the research is clear that most people experience some degree of unconscious bias, and that the effects of that bias can be countered by acknowledging its existence and utilizing response strategies, it is essential that we provide implicit bias training to all of our prosecutors and law enforcement agents. Along with the heads of our law enforcement agencies, I’m looking forward to participating in DOJ’s very first training session tomorrow morning.”

Through the new training, over 28,000 department employees will learn how to recognize and address their own implicit bias, which are the unconscious or subtle associations that individuals make between groups of people and stereotypes about those groups. Implicit bias can affect interactions and decisions due to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion and socio-economic status, as well as other factors. Social science has shown that all individuals experience some form of implicit bias but that the effects of those biases can be countered through training.

In the coming weeks, the department will begin rolling out the training to the more than 23,000 agents employed by the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and U.S. Marshals Service (USMS), as well as the approximately 5,800 attorneys working in the 94 U.S. Attorney’s Offices across the country. As the project continues, the department will expand training to other personnel, including prosecutors in the department’s litigating components and agents of the Office of the Inspector General.

Since 2010, the department’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services has worked with state and local law enforcement to train over 2,600 law enforcement officers at both the line and supervisor level in its implicit bias program known as Fair and Impartial Policing. For the department’s new internal training, curricula have been created to address the work of prosecutors and federal law enforcement and the different missions of the law enforcement components. Each law enforcement component’s curriculum includes three levels of training based on how implicit bias may affect the duties for line personnel, supervisors and managers, and executive personnel.

In order to lead by example, on Tuesday, Deputy Attorney General Yates will be joined by the leadership of FBI, ATF, DEA and USMS to participate in the first part of the executive training under the new curricula. Over the coming months, training will begin with executive personnel, followed by supervisors and managers, and later line personnel, including agents and attorneys.

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