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**STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH URGES FOCUS ON POLICE/YOUTH INTERACTIONS:
Federal Task Force on 21st Century Policing Should Make Police/Youth Interactions a Priority**

Cambridge, MA, December 9, 2014 ... Strategies for Youth, Inc. (SFY), a national non-profit policy and training organization dedicated to improving police/youth interactions and reducing disproportionate minority contact, urges the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) to make focusing on police/youth interactions a priority.

SFY commends the USDOJ decision on December 2nd to create the Task Force on 21st Century Policing to address the future of policing following recent events in Ferguson and elsewhere across the country.

Events in Ferguson, Cleveland, Albuquerque and the decade long conflict about stop and frisk policies in New York City, **all involve youth**. SFY urges the Task Force make police/youth interactions a **top priority**.

“How we police youth is a topic largely ignored until something extreme happens, but it needs to be front and center on the Task Force’s agenda,” said Lisa H. Thurau, Executive Director of Strategies for Youth, (SFY). SFY is an organization that exists solely to improve police/youth interactions and reduce disproportionate minority contact. SFY provides its *Policing the Teen Brain* training to officers nationwide.

SFY’s report, *If Not Now When? A Survey of Juvenile Justice Training in America’s Police Academies*, showed that American police academies spend:

- 6 hours on average on juvenile justice training,
- Less than 9 states’ academies train officers in skills for communicating effectively with youth,
- Only 8 academies mention the federal obligation to reduce disproportionate minority contact.

SFY’s current research found that only three states issue guidelines for police/youth interactions. All other guidelines are developed by law enforcement, often without consideration of the unique characteristics of police/youth interactions.

The urgent need for focus on police/youth interactions is underscored by national data that indicates higher rates of use of force on male teens of color. Data from the USDOJ has consistently shown extreme disparities in the treatment of youth of color: their rates of arrest and referral to courts far exceeds those of white youth.

“We know the Task Force has a lot on its plate. But we urge the Task Force to resist the temptation to let focus on police/youth interactions be an afterthought,” said Thurau. “We hope the Task Force will capitalize on the knowledge, research and experience of organizations like SFY to promote 21st century police/youth interactions.” For information on Strategies for Youth visit our website www.strategiesforyouth.com.

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