

RESEARCH THAT MATTERS

Law Enforcement and Victim Services Providers' Perspectives on LGBTQ Liaison Officers

May 2026

Stefan Vogler
Jordan Grasso
Nathan Cisneros
Michelle M. Johns

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Key Findings	2
Introduction	4
LGBTQ Police Liaisons	5
Findings	6
Institutional Support	6
Assisting LGBTQ Victims	7
Access to Training	8
Liaison Interactions with LGBTQ Communities	10
Conclusion	13
Methods	14
Limitations	15
Authors	16
Acknowledgements	16
Suggested Citation	16

Executive Summary

Over the past several decades, law enforcement agencies across the United States have established liaison officer roles to strengthen relationships with historically underserved communities, including LGBTQ communities. LGBTQ liaison officers serve as designated points of contact within departments for internal and external stakeholders, working to build trust, improve communication, and enhance responses to LGBTQ victims of crime. Despite the growth of these roles, only limited research has examined how LGBTQ liaison officers understand their roles within law enforcement agencies and how they engage with LGBTQ community members.

This report draws on 20 in-depth interviews conducted as part of the Hate Incident Reporting Initiative to Strengthen Engagement (HIRISE) project to understand how liaison roles are structured, supported, and experienced in practice by liaison officers, stakeholders, and community members. Participants included 11 law enforcement officers and nine community-based victim services providers across four U.S. cities—one in the West, one in the Midwest, one in the South, and one in the Southeast.

Key Findings

Departmental support for liaison roles varies significantly.

- In some departments, LGBTQ liaison roles are full-time and compensated; in others, they are effectively voluntary, with limited formal resources or support.
- Liaison officers with strong department support—including from department leadership—described positive experiences as liaisons and a sense of self-efficacy. In contrast, officers in departments with limited support expressed frustration at being unable to meet the goals of the liaison role.

Liaison officers strive for a central role in engaging LGBTQ communities and victims of crime.

- Liaison officers identified two key parts of their role: supporting LGBTQ victims of crimes and helping LGBTQ victims of violence feel comfortable reporting incidents to the police.
- Nevertheless, community stakeholders reported uneven experiences in police interactions, which in some cases resulted in reluctance by crime victims to interact with police.

Liaisons are key educators about LGBTQ issues within their departments.

- LGBTQ liaison officers provide formal training and informal education about LGBTQ issues within their departments. These education opportunities improve community interactions beyond those in which the liaison officers are directly involved.
- Liaison officers benefit from partnerships with community groups when developing formal training for law enforcement officers.

Sustained engagement and openness to feedback are essential for building trust with LGBTQ communities.

- Both liaison officers and community stakeholders identified the value of LGBTQ liaison officers for building long-term trust between law enforcement and the LGBTQ community.

- Community stakeholders also identified willingness to receive feedback as an important attribute for improving community relations.

Overall, the findings suggest that LGBTQ liaison officers may play an important role in improving police-community relations. Realizing this potential, however, requires strong institutional support, clear communication, and sustained engagement with LGBTQ communities. Success also requires confronting the historical and ongoing tensions that shape police-community relationships, including persistent mistreatment of LGBTQ individuals by law enforcement. Finally, this study shows that liaison officers face many context-specific challenges, underscoring the need for continued research to better understand how both local dynamics and broader trends influence the effectiveness of LGBTQ liaison officer roles.

Introduction

LGBTQ individuals experience elevated levels of violence and harassment compared to non-LGBTQ people¹ while also facing persistent mistreatment by the police.² As a result, LGBTQ people are more likely to hold negative perceptions of police³ and are less likely to report when they are the victim of a crime.⁴ Law enforcement in recent years has grappled with these concerns related to police-community engagement, professionalization, and accountability. As one response, police departments across the country have established liaison officer roles,⁵ including LGBTQ liaisons, to both signal a desire for improved community relations and to build trust, or, at a minimum, to signal a commitment to doing so.⁶ LGBTQ liaison officers, in particular, are trained in issues affecting LGBTQ communities and are often members of these communities themselves. LGBTQ liaison officers ultimately aim to provide more supportive and affirming interactions with law enforcement among LGBTQ communities.⁷

Nevertheless, relatively little research has examined how LGBTQ police liaison officers understand and engage with LGBTQ communities, particularly within the context of the United States.⁸ This report addresses this gap by presenting findings on the experiences of LGBTQ police liaison officers and victim services providers within the U.S. Leveraging key informant interviews from across the U.S., we found 1) that institutional support for liaisons varies, and this variability shapes reported self-efficacy in liaison roles; 2) liaison officers prioritize engaging LGBTQ victims of crime who feel uncomfortable interacting with police; 3) there is a shared belief that training is central to improving LGBTQ-police relations; and 4) there is a desire for increased police-community interaction as a method for building trust and improving outcomes.

¹ Meyer, I. H., & Flores, A. R. (2025). *Anti-LGBT victimization in the United States: Results from the National Crime Victimization Survey (2022–2023)*. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Anti-LGBT-Violence-Feb-2025.pdf>

² Arrayales, J., Mallory, C., & Grasso, J. (2025). *Law enforcement and LGBTQ people: A review of 25 years of research*. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law; Grasso, J., Vogler, S., Greytak, E. A., Kindall, C., & Jenness, V. (2024). *Policing progress: Findings from a national survey of LGBTQ+ people's experiences with law enforcement*. American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org/publications/policing-progress-findings-from-a-national-survey-of-lgbtq-peoples-experiences-with-law-enforcement>

³ Owen, S. S., Burke, T. W., Few-Demo, A. L., & Natwick, J. (2018). *Perceptions of the police by LGBT communities*. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 43(3), 668–693. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-017-9420-8>

⁴ Grasso, J., Vogler, S., Greytak, E. A., Kindall, C., & Jenness, V. (2024). *Policing progress: Findings from a national survey of LGBTQ+ people's experiences with law enforcement*. American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org/publications/policing-progress-findings-from-a-national-survey-of-lgbtq-peoples-experiences-with-law-enforcement>; Vogler, S., & Jenness, V. (2024). *Data dashboard. Policing the Rainbow*. <https://policingtherainbow.com/data-dashboard>

⁵ Throughout this report, we use the term “liaison” to refer specifically to formalized positions within police departments, distinguishing these official roles from the broader concept of individuals informally bridging institutions and communities (e.g., between police and LGBTQ communities). Accordingly, when we refer to “liaisons,” “police liaisons,” or “liaison officers,” we mean police officers who hold designated liaison roles with the responsibility of engaging with community members to build relationships and facilitate communication between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.

⁶ Dwyer, A. (2014). Pleasures, perversities, and partnerships: The historical emergence of LGBT–police relationships. In V. R. Panfil & D. Peterson (Eds.), *Handbook of LGBT communities, crime, and justice* (pp. 149–164). Springer. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/66161/2/66161.pdf>

⁷ Bartkowiak-Theron, I. (2011). Partnership policing for policing organisations. In P. Birch & V. Herrington (Eds.), *Policing in practice* (pp. 180–204). Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸ Much of the existing research is derived from Australia. See, Dwyer, A., Ball, M., Lee, M., Crofts, T., & Bond, C. (2020). *Barriers stopping LGBTI people from accessing LGBTI police liaison officers: Analysing interviews with community and police*. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 33(3), 256–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2020.1786280>; Dwyer, A., Bond, C., Ball, M., Lee, M., & Crofts, T. (2022). *Support provided by LGBTI police liaison services: An analysis of a survey of LGBTIQ people in Australia*. University of Tasmania. https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/journal_contribution/Support_provided_by_LGBTI_Police_Liaison_Services_An_analysis_of_a_survey_of_LGBTIQ_people_in_Australia/23002328/1/files/40753028.pdf

LGBTQ Police Liaisons

Law enforcement agencies are increasingly establishing a range of liaison officer positions to bridge divides between police departments and historically underserved populations, including LGBTQ communities.⁹ Liaisons often serve as a visible extension of law enforcement departments, initiating communication with community members to address historically tense relationships and educate them about the role of policing. LGBTQ liaison officers, in particular, serve as dedicated points of contact within law enforcement agencies to build trust and improve relationships between police and LGBTQ communities. Although expectations for these roles vary across departments, LGBTQ liaison officers often assist LGBTQ crime victims, engage with LGBTQ community leaders and businesses, contribute to police trainings on LGBTQ-related issues, and provide a positive police presence at community events, among other potential responsibilities.¹⁰

Although LGBTQ communities generally support the existence of LGBTQ police liaison positions within police departments,¹¹ research on the effectiveness of liaisons remains inconclusive. Some studies suggest that LGBTQ liaison officers struggle to reconcile the historical and ongoing harms experienced by LGBTQ individuals at the hands of police, while many LGBTQ individuals perceive liaison officers as functionally similar to other police personnel, despite their designated liaison role.¹² Even when LGBTQ people are aware of these liaison roles, they report low levels of interaction and remain reluctant to seek them out for support.¹³ Other research indicates persistent discrimination experienced by LGBTQ police officers themselves within their departments, leading LGBTQ police officers to conceal their identities in the workplace and conform to police cultural norms.¹⁴ Consequently, LGBTQ liaison officers are tasked not only with serving the needs of LGBTQ communities but must also often challenge anti-LGBTQ prejudice and discrimination within their own departments.¹⁵ Meanwhile, negative experiences with law enforcement continue to be widely reported among LGBTQ individuals.¹⁶

⁹ Asquith, N. L., & Bartkowiak-Théron, I. (2021). Police liaison. In N. L. Asquith & I. Bartkowiak-Théron (Eds.), *Policing practices and vulnerable people* (pp. 129–146). Springer.

¹⁰ Pyatt, T., Gallagher, R., Vogler, S., & Johns, M. M. (2026). *Understanding and addressing hate crimes towards LGBTQ communities: Results from a scoping review*. Evidence Base. <https://doi.org/10.1080/30679125.2026.2643186>

¹¹ Data from a nationally representative survey show that 58.33% of LGBTQ adults in the U.S. and 31.69% of non-LGBTQ adults believe police departments should have LGBTQ liaison officers ($\chi^2 = 76.59, p < 0.05$). For more on the survey, see Vogler, S., & Jenness, V. (2024). *Policing the Rainbow*. <https://policingtherainbow.com>.

¹² Dwyer, A., Ball, M., Lee, M., Crofts, T., & Bond, C. (2020). *Barriers stopping LGBTI people from accessing LGBTI police liaison officers: Analysing interviews with community and police*. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 33(3), 256–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2020.1786280>

¹³ Dwyer, A., Ball, M., Bond, C., Lee, M., & Crofts, T. (2017). *Exploring LGBTI police liaison services: Factors influencing their use and effectiveness according to LGBTI people and LGBTI police liaison officers: Report to the Criminology Research Advisory Council (Grant CRG 31/11–12)*. Criminology Research Advisory Council. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/104064/>

¹⁴ Brockenberry, R., Bryant, M., Chagadama, J., & Luamba, D. (2025). *Enhancing Inclusivity: The Systemic Challenges Faced by LGBTQ Officers in the Law Enforcement Workplace*, 8(4), 87–94. <https://www.ajjbm.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/1848794.pdf>; Sears, B., Hasenbush, A., & Mallory, C. (2013). *Discrimination against law enforcement officers on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity: 2000 to 2013*. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3h220044>

¹⁵ Dwyer, A., Ball, M., Bond, C., Lee, M., & Crofts, T. (2017). *Exploring LGBTI police liaison services: Factors influencing their use and effectiveness according to LGBTI people and LGBTI police liaison officers: Report to the Criminology Research Advisory Council (Grant CRG 31/11–12)*. Criminology Research Advisory Council. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/104064/>

¹⁶ Arrayales, J., Mallory, C., & Grasso, J. (2025). *Law enforcement and LGBTQ people: A review of 25 years of research*. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law; Grasso, J., Vogler, S., Greytak, E. A., Kindall, C., & Jenness, V. (2024). *Policing progress: Findings from a national survey of LGBTQ+ people's experiences with law enforcement*. American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org/publications/policing-progress-findings-from-a-national-survey-of-lgbtq-peoples-experiences-with-law-enforcement>; Vogler, S., & Jenness, V. (2024). *Data dashboard*. *Policing the Rainbow*.

Findings

We identified four overarching themes across interviews with law enforcement and community-based victim services providers: institutional support for LGBTQ police liaisons, assistance for LGBTQ victims of crimes, access to LGBTQ-related trainings for law enforcement, and LGBTQ liaisons' desire to engage with the community.

Institutional Support

Interview respondents reported significant variability in the level of institutional support within police departments for LGBTQ liaison positions. In some departments, LGBTQ liaison roles are full-time and compensated; in others, they are effectively voluntary and carried out in addition to officers' regular duties. Officers in the latter context described considerable difficulty performing their liaison duties. One part-time liaison officer expressed these resource challenges:

The frustration is that ... I'm very well aware that this could be a full-time position. Do I think that our department will ever get there? Probably not just because of the—in general, across the nation, even with just trying to hire, you know, it's hard to—we're struggling to recruit people. Even though I have many, many goals in mind, I just, I know that because I have to fill it in whenever I fill in wherever I can ... I think I will always fall short.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

When institutional support is limited, officers expressed frustration that they were unable to meet their goals for the liaison position. Competing demands from their primary policing responsibilities required them to fit liaison work in wherever possible, rather than dedicating sustained attention to it.

This stands in sharp contrast to departments where officers are assigned to the liaison role full-time. Officers assigned to the liaison role on a full-time basis undertake a range of responsibilities, including responding to calls involving LGBTQ victims upon request, organizing community events, assisting colleagues in using correct pronouns and identities, and communicating critical information to community members following incidents such as assaults or homicides—particularly those involving transgender individuals, where name changes may affect identification. A full-time liaison officer listed some department programs:

It's a lot. I run the educational portion of the community part in the academy. So I teach a class along with [an advocacy organization] to get the new recruits—they're about to be police officers—familiar with the community itself.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

In short, officers with strong institutional support are able to devote focused, full-time effort to the liaison role and, as a result, believe they accomplish substantially more than those with limited support believe they can.

Institutional support extends beyond dedicated time and compensation. It also includes meaningful access to departmental leadership, which enhances the effectiveness of LGBTQ liaison officers. One officer shared a story about how they were able to communicate LGBTQ community concerns directly to the chief of their department. Institutional support in this instance looked like the chief responding

immediately to the liaison officer's concerns and agreeing to increase community outreach efforts. Officers with direct access to leadership described more responsive engagement with the concerns they raised about the LGBTQ community, as well as stronger overall institutional backing. These gestures of support can take a variety of forms:

Oh my gosh, [support from leadership] is great. It really has been great. ... Two years ago, I said to the chief, "Hey, you know, one of the concerns the public has is ... they don't want us in uniform, or can you dress down?" And we really can't. ... But I said to our chief, "Well, how about we get hats that have our logo embroidered in rainbow?" So, we got hats, and I think got maybe 250 hats. I had 10 left at the end of the day.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

For this liaison officer, this simple act demonstrated not only support from leadership but also the practical limits of that support. When community members expressed discomfort with fully uniformed officers, the chief maintained the requirement for uniforms. Instead of reducing visible markers of policing, leadership introduced a symbolic compromise—rainbow-embroidered hats bearing the department's logo. This gesture layered a community-oriented symbol onto existing police visibility rather than directly addressing the underlying concern about uniformed presence.

Assisting LGBTQ Victims

Research shows that many LGBTQ people are wary of the police and reluctant to report crime victimization.¹⁷ As such, a primary role described by liaison officers involved providing victim support and helping LGBTQ victims of violence feel comfortable reporting their experiences to the police. An LGBTQ liaison officer detailed this vital part of their duties:

I'll receive phone calls when I'm off duty from an officer who may have had an incident with an LGBTQ person, right? And they're not comfortable speaking. They don't want to talk to the police. They don't want to talk to an officer. They're in trouble. They need help. But they don't know where to get help because they've made up their minds that they can't trust us.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

Given this reluctance to report victimization or seek help from the police among LGBTQ people, liaison officers described developing relationships with community stakeholders to help connect community members to resources:

I get a lot of phone calls ... [from] stakeholders in the community. ... And those stakeholders, most of them have my actual cell phone number. ... If someone comes to a clergy or someone comes to a store. Or someone goes to a council meeting, there's somebody there that has my direct number, and I do get calls. ... I got a call this weekend about a placement for an LGBTQ youth.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

¹⁷ Arrayales, J., Mallory, C., & Grasso, J. (2025). *Law enforcement and LGBTQ people: A review of 25 years of research*. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Police-Interactions-LGBTQ-Nov-2025.pdf>; Grasso, J., Vogler, S., Greytak, E. A., Kindall, C., & Jenness, V. (2024). *Policing progress: Findings from a national survey of LGBTQ+ people's experiences with law enforcement*. American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org/publications/policing-progress-findings-from-a-national-survey-of-lgbtq-peoples-experiences-with-law-enforcement>; Vogler, S., & Jenness, V. (2024). *Data dashboard. Policing the Rainbow*. <https://policingtherainbow.com/data-dashboard>

Liaison officers may also be called on by other officers who are handling cases involving LGBTQ people to get guidance and input:

Typically, they do give me a call and say, "Hey, this is the victim that we have. What they're telling me doesn't sound like it's biased, but the person's LGBTQ, and I just want you to kind of, like, can I run this by you and what do you think about it?" I get those calls quite frequently.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

However, some officers who were not liaison officers attributed reporting challenges primarily to the LGBTQ community itself:

I think every victim is treated fairly and with respect. ... I think the issue is not so much with the department as it may be within the community. Certain members of the community don't feel like they can come forward or don't want to. And that's a myriad of reasons. ... Maybe they haven't come out to their family or, you know, certain people, and they don't want any reports. Some of them feel like their own actions caused them to be a victim, and they're ashamed of it. So, I mean, there's a myriad of reasons why we're having problems with reporting. ... But the only hindrance I see is the community coming forward on it.

— Hate Crimes Detective

This perspective, however, was not universally shared by liaison officers and victim services providers. While apprehension within LGBTQ communities was evident from conversations with LGBTQ victims of crime,¹⁸ some officers appeared to downplay the role that police themselves can play in shaping distrust. As one victim services provider explained, a previous liaison officer was simply not helpful or friendly:

[The liaison officer] didn't respond. She didn't know things. She's just, she's kind of a cipher. ... There wasn't much there, there.

— Victim Services Provider

Nevertheless, the type of direct service between police and the community that liaison officers offer may facilitate greater trust and therefore reporting of victimization among LGBTQ people.

Access to Training

Liaison officers emphasized LGBTQ-related training, both formal and informal, and general exposure to LGBTQ issues as key methods for educating fellow officers. All departments involved in the study reported at least some training on interactions with LGBTQ people, usually during academy training. Many also required refresher trainings every few years. Trainings typically involved topics such as proper pronoun use, using people's preferred identity categories (i.e., gay, lesbian, queer, etc.), and how to handle domestic disputes involving same-sex couples. One training officer described a recent session:

¹⁸ Derived from unpublished qualitative interviews with LGBTQ victims of crime conducted as part of the larger research project. See also, Dwyer, A., Bond, C. E. W., Lee, M., Ball, M., & Crofts, T. (2022). Support provided by LGBTI police liaison services: An analysis of a survey of LGBTIQ people in Australia. *Police Quarterly*, 25(1), 33–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10986111211038048>

Well, our latest training that we've unveiled was the pronoun training. And that was basically if the officer is not sure how to address the person, they can ask. So if I get your driver's license and clearly it says male on the driver's license, but clearly you are dressed in a dress and stuff like that, I'll ask you how you would like to be addressed. Would you like to be addressed as Mr. or Mrs. Smith, and we try to accommodate that way.

— Community Services and Liaison Supervisor

In some jurisdictions, expanded training on gender-related issues has contributed to greater awareness and, in turn, prompted policy changes—particularly in detention practices within jails. One liaison officer explained that, after consulting with other law enforcement agencies across the country and community partners, their department shifted from assigning individuals to gender-segregated holding facilities based on genitalia to taking a person's gender identity into account.

In 2021, along with the sheriff's department, we came to basically taking gender identity more into account. So, like at this time, if we arrest somebody and they, regardless of how they present, if they identify as a different sex or nonbinary, we are more or less asking them. ... We're no longer asking questions about genitalia, thankfully. We're now just asking what actual facility they would actually feel comfortable at.

— Training Officer

LGBTQ liaison officers have been instrumental in many of these changes and in developing and delivering training initiatives. Respondents frequently described providing trainings collaboratively, both with fellow officers as well as in partnership with LGBTQ community organizations:

An organization that specializes in training and workshops will come into one of the classes. Then I have the transgender specialist come in to teach another class. Myself and my partner teach a class, as well.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

Across interviews, a consistent theme was the value of partnering with LGBTQ organizations and subject-matter experts to enhance training effectiveness. One community partner, a victim services provider, described this collaboration:

We have done a little bit of work with law enforcement on a national level. We did coordinate some trainings and a law enforcement guide. ... We've got a webinar on best practices of law enforcement and working with LGBTQ victims. We've got a publication improving relations with LGBTQ communities, a guide for law enforcement.

— Victim Services Provider

Community partners also contributed to foundational LGBTQ-related education programming and provided resources and guidance on best practices. Another community-based victim services provider illustrated their integration with police department LGBTQ trainings:

I train new recruits for [city] police and [neighboring city] police. I've also consulted with [additional neighboring city] police on an issue when they had a, I believe it was a sergeant, that was transitioning from male to female.

— Victim Services Provider

These service providers show how community partners not only help with formal trainings on LGBTQ issues but also advise on personnel matters and shape departmental culture.

Training in a broader sense can also be informal. It may come from simply knowing LGBTQ people and having openly LGBTQ officers on the force. One liaison officer, who is openly gay and conducts trainings, reflected on the role of sharing personal stories:

When [officers] start hearing and seeing these folks and hearing these stories, it really, you kind of see a switch. Not that they were ever judgmental. It's just a switch, you know, like you can see them going, "Holy crap! I can't imagine ever going through that," or, "Man, my life's been pretty darn easy in comparison." And just the level of interest, you know, with asking questions, cause we really weren't sure. ... We didn't know how this would go, especially when we're dealing with some of the folks who have been on, you know, 30 plus years or even late 20s, you know, this is a pretty new thing to bring in. But it was super rewarding to see folks and their response to actually hearing stories.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

As this account illustrates, the visibility and openness of LGBTQ officers can foster greater understanding among fellow officers, serving as a strong complement to formal training initiatives.

Liaison Interactions with LGBTQ Communities

A final theme that emerged from respondents was the desire among victim services providers to see officers engage with the LGBTQ community directly in a more community-oriented style of policing.¹⁹ Consistent with these perspectives, prior research indicates a similar desire among some LGBTQ individuals for greater police participation in community events.²⁰ One victim services provider highlighted a perceived gap between law enforcement and LGBTQ community members and the need for improved engagement:

I think that there would need to be some community relations efforts coming from police, just focused on getting to know the community and serving the community. I mean, I think that the gap [between the police and LGBTQ community] is really big right now.

— Victim Services Provider

Research suggests that perspectives on police presence at community events vary across diverse LGBTQ populations.²¹ Some LGBTQ individuals interpret police presence at Pride events, for example, as a sign

¹⁹ Community-oriented policing refers to a style of policing in which officers maintain a visible and accessible presence within communities and emphasize collaborative relationships with residents (Goldstein, 1987). Under this model, officers are granted discretion to identify and respond to community-specific concerns, while community members are expected to play an active role in shaping policing priorities and responses. More recent scholarship, however, has raised questions about the effectiveness and broader impacts of this approach (Cheng, 2024; Gascón & Roussell, 2020); Cheng, T. (2024). *The policing machine: Enforcement, endorsements, and the illusion of public input*. Princeton University Press; Gascón, L. D., & Roussell, A. (2020). *The limits of community policing: Civilian power and police accountability in Black and Brown Los Angeles*. NYU Press; Goldstein, H. (1987). Toward community-oriented policing: Potential, basic requirements, and threshold questions. *Crime & Delinquency*, 33(1), 6–30.

²⁰ Troia, B. (2025). "They provide the illusion of safety": Police at Pride and the politics of belonging. *Youth & Society*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07311214251333419>

²¹ Troia, B. (2025). "They provide the illusion of safety": Police at Pride and the politics of belonging. *Youth & Society*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07311214251333419>

of progress in police-LGBTQ relations. In contrast, some individuals view police participation, especially in LGBTQ community events, as a failure of LGBTQ movements.²² For these individuals, such participation reflects alignment with institutions that have historically marginalized LGBTQ people and continue to regulate non-normative identities and practices.

One victim services provider expressed a desire for deeper community engagement than is typically offered that reckons with community critiques:

I think in general they just need to listen to the community a little bit more, and not the "Oh yeah, I hear you, like, we're tabling to recruit you," but more of like, "Criticize us and what are actual things we can do to do better and then act upon those things," which I have not seen. But that's the dream.

— Victim Services Provider

Engagement with the community, however, differed across the four cities in this study, with departments that provided stronger institutional support for liaison officers reporting more time for direct involvement. One department with a full-time LGBTQ liaison officer reported robust community engagement:

Well, our hands are in a lot. We go to a lot of different community events, and I try to make sure the LGBTQ citizens I encounter on a day-to-day basis, you know, like, "Do you need, you know, access to care? Do you need services that I can provide direction to any of the local nonprofits who work in the LGBTQ space?" So my hand is involved in quite a bit.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

Liaison officers also noted that community involvement required receiving criticism from the community:

Obviously, law enforcement and the LGBT community have a strained relationship. You know, it's been there since Stonewall. And you know, as a liaison, I try to make efforts, and because I go to these meetings, you know, and I take the brunt of a lot of the bad feelings and animosity from the community.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

However, when lines of communication are open and liaison officers are institutionally supported, community responses appeared more positive:

One of our [LGBTQ community] center folks has reached out to me numerous times, saying you know [LGBTQ liaison officer] is just a godsend, and same with [another LGBTQ liaison officer]. They're both just very compassionate, really good officers, great at getting the resources that folks need.

— LGBTQ Liaison Officer

These accounts highlight a final takeaway: for LGBTQ liaison officers to be effective, they must be equipped to engage both the community and their departments. This requires sufficient time and resources to attend community events, host community forums, build informal relationships, and maintain lines of communication with department leadership to share community concerns. Still, as the

²² Russell, E. K. (2019). *Ambivalent investments: Lessons from LGBTIQ efforts to reform policing*. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 31(3), 378–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2019.1658694>

interviews revealed, an emphasis on liaisons must account for the constraints imposed by policies and procedures that limit their autonomy, discretion, and capacity to translate community concerns into meaningful organizational change.

Conclusion

Based on 20 interviews across four U.S. cities, we identified four themes related to the effectiveness of LGBTQ liaison officers. First, levels of institutional support for liaison positions varied considerably, and this variability shapes how effectively liaisons could perform their roles. Second, respondents emphasized that a central responsibility of successful liaison officers is direct engagement with LGBTQ victims of crime, particularly those who feel uncomfortable interacting with police. Third, access to training emerged as a key factor in improving LGBTQ-police relations; liaison officers highlighted the importance of collaborative training efforts involving both officers and community members. Finally, liaisons and victim services providers expressed a desire for increased police-community interaction to build trust and improve outcomes.

These findings are particularly salient given the persistent mistreatment of LGBTQ communities by police,²³ the disproportionate violence experienced by LGBTQ people,²⁴ and the recent expansion of anti-LGBTQ laws and policies.²⁵ While some data suggest that LGBTQ people support the creation of LGBTQ liaison positions,²⁶ other evidence indicates that communities remain reluctant to engage with liaisons when such roles do exist.²⁷ Despite this mixed response, LGBTQ communities generally express support for more transformative approaches to reform compared to non-LGBTQ individuals, such as the defunding of police, which is understood both as the reallocation of police funding and, for some, the disbanding of police altogether.²⁸

Nonetheless, LGBTQ liaison officers offer one potential step in improving LGBTQ-police relations. As findings from this report indicate, realizing this potential requires improved communication between liaison officers—and police more broadly—and LGBTQ communities, greater institutional support, and a meaningful reckoning with the historical and ongoing tensions and mistreatment shaping these relationships. The findings further suggest that many of the barriers faced by liaison officers are locally specific and that continued research is needed to better understand both context-driven challenges and broader patterns.

²³ Arrayales, J., Mallory, C., & Grasso, J. (2025). *Law enforcement and LGBTQ people: A review of 25 years of research*. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Police-Interactions-LGBTQ-Nov-2025.pdf>

²⁴ Meyer, I. H., & Flores, A. R. (2025). *Anti-LGBT victimization in the United States: Results from the National Crime Victimization Survey (2022–2023)*. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Anti-LGBT-Violence-Feb-2025.pdf>

²⁵ Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2025). *2024 state equality index: A review of state legislation affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community and a look ahead in 2025*. <https://reports.hrc.org/2024-state-equality-index#state-legislative-maps>; Movement Advancement Project. (2026). *LGBTQ equality by state*. <https://mapresearch.org/equality/>

²⁶ See Footnote 11.

²⁷ Dwyer, A., Ball, M., Bond, C., Lee, M., & Crofts, T. (2017). *Exploring LGBTI police liaison services: Factors influencing their use and effectiveness according to LGBTI people and LGBTI police liaison officers: Report to the Criminology Research Advisory Council (Grant CRG 31/11–12)*. Criminology Research Advisory Council. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/104064/>

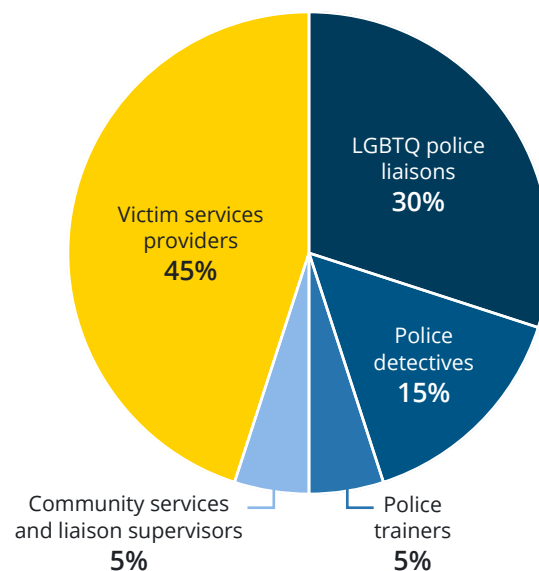
²⁸ Jenness, V., & Vogler, S. (2025). *LGBTQ+ perspectives on police reform: An examination of support for defunding, reallocating, and disbanding*. *Criminology*, 63(2), 545–556. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12405>

Methods

The Hate Incident Reporting Initiative to Strengthen Engagement (HIRISE)²⁹ project aimed to understand barriers and facilitators to reporting hate-motivated violence experienced by LGBTQ people from both the community and law enforcement sides in order to increase reporting of such incidents. LGBTQ liaison officers emerged as one salient factor in that equation.

Between February and October of 2024, the HIRISE research team conducted 20 in-depth interviews with 11 law enforcement officers and nine community-based victim services providers across four U.S. cities—one in the West, one in the Midwest, one in the South, and one in the Southeast.³⁰ These locations were chosen for geographic variability and to capture variation in social and political climates affecting LGBTQ communities, including differences in political orientations and hate crime protections, some of which explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity, while others do not. Three of the police departments were similar in size, while the fourth was substantially larger, employing nearly twice as many sworn officers as the others.

Figure 1. Interview participants (N=20)



Interviewees were selected based on their experience working with LGBTQ victims of violence and their knowledge of the relationships between police and LGBTQ communities. Victim services providers were selected because of their direct contact and familiarity with LGBTQ liaison officers in their communities. The HIRISE team aimed to capture perspectives from both law enforcement and LGBTQ community stakeholders to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role and effectiveness of LGBTQ liaison officers.

²⁹ For more information on the HIRISE Research Project, see <https://www.norc.org/research/projects/hate-incident-reporting-initiative-strengthen-engagement-hirise.html>

³⁰ To protect confidentiality, all identifying details, including specific locations and names, have been removed.

The broader study qualitatively explored the practices and constraints shaping LGBTQ police liaison roles, as well as broader police interactions with LGBTQ communities. Interviews addressed a range of topics, including departmental support for LGBTQ liaison roles, relevant policies and practices, and community perceptions of both the police overall and liaison roles specifically. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically coded by the HIRISE team.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was limited to four mid-sized to large cities and their police departments. This excludes smaller agencies, which comprise the majority of law enforcement in the U.S. and likely lack the resources and population size needed to support LGBTQ liaison officers. However, larger departments—such as sheriffs and state police—serve the majority of the U.S. population and therefore remain important to examine. Second, the study reflects only the perspectives of police personnel and victim services providers and does not include the views of LGBTQ community members. As a result, the findings do not capture how LGBTQ communities experience and perceive police interactions and the role of liaisons. Third, the data were collected prior to President Trump's second term, during which new policies affecting LGBTQ individuals have emerged and may influence current LGBTQ-police relations, interactions, and perceptions. Consequently, recent shifts in policy context and public sentiment are not reflected in the data and may shape both law enforcement practices and community attitudes.

Authors

Stefan Vogler, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Jordan Grasso, Ph.D., is a Research Data Analyst at the Williams Institute.

Nathan Cisneros, M.S., is the HIV Criminalization Project Director at the Williams Institute.

Michelle M. Johns, MPH, Ph.D., is a Senior Research Scientist at NORC at the University of Chicago.

Acknowledgements

We thank the members of the HIRISE research team who helped conduct this research, including Sarah Hodge, Erin Fordyce, Sierra Arnold, and Tabitha Pyatt. We are also grateful to the interviewees who took the time to speak with the HIRISE team. In addition, we thank Sarah Hodge, Christy Mallory, and Laurel Sprague for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this report.

The HIRISE project was supported by the National Institute of Justice under grant number 15PNIJ-22-GG-00998-RESS. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

Suggested Citation

Vogler, S., Grasso, J., Cisneros, N., & Johns, M. M. (2026). *Law enforcement and victim services providers' perspectives on LGBTQ liaison officers*. The Williams Institute.

ABOUT THE WILLIAMS INSTITUTE

The Williams Institute is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy. A think tank at UCLA Law, the Williams Institute produces high-quality research with real-world relevance and disseminates it to judges, legislators, policymakers, media, and the public. These studies can be accessed at the Williams Institute website.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law
williamsinstitute@law.ucla.edu
williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu

RESEARCH THAT MATTERS

