

Good afternoon. I would like to frame my remarks today by stating that I am speaking both for myself as a postdoctoral fellow with 10 years of history at Penn, and on behalf of Penn Community for Justice, a platform for any Penn adjacent person to organize for economic and racial justice through collective action centered on an equitable vision of Penn's relationship with Philadelphia.

The stated purpose of this initiative is to evaluate Penn's public safety system – to be clear, its private police force -- in light of the university's commitment to ensuring that every community member, "is treated with dignity and respect... in ways that prioritize and promote racial equality and justice." If we are interpreting community to mean not just members of the university, but also the broader sociocultural context of the city whose land Penn occupies, then Penn has already failed in this commitment. Like other university police forces, Penn's private police department was developed to protect university property and wealth, not people.

There is certainly plenty to protect: According to university archives, since moving to the West Philadelphia campus in 1872, Penn has expanded 100-fold. The history of those property acquisitions is tarnished by systematic disenfranchisement, from profiting off of redlining practices that discriminated against growing Black communities to "urban renewal" necessitated in part by neglect of properties the university already owned. Public policy initiatives were corrupted by conflicts of interest, since they were conveniently headed by Penn trustees, presidents and alumni. Penn consolidated its local power so effectively that when the Penn-led West Philadelphia Corporation destroyed the Black Bottom neighborhood, no one except community residents lifted a finger to stop them.

These acts of violence against West Philadelphia communities, alongside decades of public disinvestment, set the stage for the crime and violence that took place along campus borders in the 1970s through 90s, to which Superintendent Rush has referred so frequently today. Rather than using its power and influence to effect positive change, Penn invested in an increasingly militarized private police force and blue light telephones to visually denote "our" territory. It is not a coincidence that today Penn holds \$3.2 billion in tax-exempt property, has a \$14.7 billion endowment, and has the second largest university police force in the country, while also residing in the poorest major city in the country.

I offer this history as an essential context for the remainder of my remarks, because the Penn Police cannot be viewed in isolation from this ongoing, invisible violence. I am a cis-gender white woman, so thankfully I have had few interactions with the Penn Police Department. Even so, I have found their commitment to "public safety" to be severely lacking. Like many other students, my first experience of Penn Police was at New Student Orientation, when the Department of Public Safety scared the living daylights out of students and their parents with vivid descriptions of the terrors of the urban environment. Then there was the video testimonial of a student who had been shot near campus, followed by admonishments not to go further west than 42<sup>nd</sup> St. It's not that new students shouldn't be counseled to exercise caution in an

unfamiliar city, but these sessions are undeniably psychological manipulation designed to foster a sense of dependence on campus police.

In fact, my experience of living all over this city over the past 10 years has been one of comfort, and I have had the privilege of very rarely feeling threatened. I have felt unsafe on campus when I was almost hit by a car on my bike, while a Penn Police officer sat on his phone in a patrol car at the corner. This has happened on multiple occasions, and because the color of my skin enables me to challenge the police without fearing for my life, I've sometimes asked the officers whether they were going to do something. Their response? "Not my job." My question to this panel: what *is* their job then? It certainly is not enforcing traffic safety, because I've witnessed other cyclists hit by Penn Medicine's valet drivers, and my partner has been verbally threatened by one driving recklessly through the parking deck. Not crime prevention, because research shows that community investment reduces crime, not policing. Not supporting people in mental health crises, because that's what CAPS is supposed to do.

I would like to conclude by lifting up the voices of those who have had the courage to share their experiences of racial discrimination by Penn Police through social media and published accounts. In one instance, the minority individual described being called a "stupid f\*\*\*ing drunk" by a Penn Police officer while also being detained and having their belongings searched, probably illegally, as white students walked by, obviously inebriated but unhindered. Other students have shared similar experiences of racial profiling while studying late in the library, or, most poignantly to me as a Nursing alumna, in Fagin Hall. The Black students in that particular incident noted that Maureen Rush defended the officers in question rather than their rights as students to be in a campus building, thereby delegitimizing the students' trauma. Philadelphia residents have filed excessive force complaints against Penn Police, and let's not forget the events on May 31<sup>st</sup> at 52nd St, when Penn Police were several blocks outside of their patrol zone participating in attacks on protestors that triggered an NAACP lawsuit. The problem is best summed up by this final vignette: a Penn Police officer told a student working on a class project that before every shift, their supervisor would say, "It's a war out there, protect yourselves." Do we *want* armed campus police who operate with a military mindset, few mechanisms for accountability, and view the community as the enemy?

This is a sociocultural problem that goes beyond empty platitudes and toothless solutions. Penn has had several public safety review committees and panels like this one, all of which recommended additional training and reforms, which have changed nothing. This time must be different. We should not be afraid of changing the status quo simply because it is difficult, especially when there is already research and alternative models to guide us. Policing in the United States is an institution created for the purposes of racial and class control, even on college campuses, and organizations built from that history cannot be reformed. We demand that the university: pay PILOT contributions into an Education Equity Fund as actual, publicly controlled community investments; permanently divest from the prison industrial complex and organizations supporting militarized policing; provide transparent publication of financial records for Penn Police and their relationships with the Philadelphia Police Department; and commit to

police-free strategies for campus safety. Then, and only then, will we start to believe in Penn's commitment to racial justice. Thank you for your time.