

Introduction:

Sharon Smith, Associate Vice Provost for University Life, and member of the Penn Community for over 30 years.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge for the past six months the incredibly sad transformation that we have seen around our country regarding violence towards Black people, especially our young black males. It is not lost on me that these violence acts are being committed by people who are charged with protecting all of us. Nor that I have two brothers and nephews that I fear any day I could potentially get a call about their lives in today's America.

When I was asked to speak today, I did not hesitate. However, since the requests I have had a chance to think about it. I hope my presence here today sends a clear message. One, that I am an advocate and a resource for all our students and in order to do so I collaborate with many offices and administrators. Specifically, today I want to talk about the people that I know and have worked with for more than 20 years.

The Penn Police is a department within the Division of Public Safety. Why do I say that? It is because it is one of the many departments on Penn's campus that is charged with protecting, advocating and supporting our family Penn. Penn Police + Special Services + Allied + Fire & Emergency Services + MERT partnerships.

I speak from my heart and for all our community, those who understand and those whom I suspect want to see changes in the police department at Penn.

I want to talk about the public safety that I know: The Department of Public Safety, specifically Special Services and the Penn Police.

I've worked at Penn for over 30 years now, so let me start with a true story of 20 years ago, when I first started working closely with the Penn police. Student intervention services is an office that functions 24 seven and works closely with the Penn police and Special Services in response to students in distress. I recalled getting one of my very first phone calls at 2 AM. it was a student who had been taken to the hospital in serious condition. That officer called me on the way to the hospital, right after the student was seen by a doctor, he stayed at HUP until he was

sure the student was safe, and then he called to say he was leaving because he was sure the student was stable. I remember thinking what compassionate, thoughtfulness.

The Penn police are indispensable partners in supporting student mental health. Few people on campus know how often the police check on students and get them support in response to concerns about suicidal thoughts and other mental health issues. The police have the capacity to respond immediately at any of time of day, any day of the year, which no other department on campus can do. And I know when I started on this journey, in this job, I could not have done it alone.

The officers collaborate with partners such as CAPS, Student Intervention Services, and college house staff to provide the best support for students in distress or at risk.

- As Collaborators: They are in the room, with us – and with students – to plan and implement intricate, complex and potentially contentious situations and they do so nonjudgmentally.

Another example, many years ago, I recall meeting officer, Now LT. Gary Williams. He call me from the bookstore in response to a shoplifting case. Instead of taking the student to 4000 Chestnut, he called me and then walked the student to my office. As the time, I wondered why. The situation had nothing to do with BOOKS but lack of food. Lt Williams was able to capture the moment.

- As Partners: They give rides or walking escorts to anyone, anytime. They comfort and support students who are victims of crime, especially interpersonal violence. In times of crisis, or pre-crisis, they are in problem-solving mode.

They also use their own emotional intelligence and people skills to establish rapport with students and persuade students to seek the help they need. Penn police officers have even helped take care of a distressed student's dog to overcome a barrier for her in going to the hospital. I was there when they offered to watch the animal if the student would come with me.

Finally, I work very closely with Special Services, the other resources that many of us rely on for the most critical incidents, death of a student, a missing student, sexual assaults. Pat Brennan, Director of Special Services, Can you recall the time we went all the way to South West Philadelphia, at the request of CAPS, to check on the well-being of a student. Once we arrived, we knew something was very wrong, and we had to work together to convince the student to come with us, which they did, because we were not going to leave without them. The next day we got a call from CAPS, the intervention had saved the life of our student.

- They help us find students, get students help, assure families, connect people to resources. They employ therapeutic practices in their interactions with students and community members to diffuse potentially volatile situations.

Finally, when I sit on the interview panel to hire new officers, I look for a person first, someone who recognize that they work in a diverse and inclusive community. When I walk down Walnut Street or Locust Walk and I recognized an officer who was hired, that means I sat on an interview panel and thought he or she would make a good fit for our students. When I sit on the panel, I look for an person who will be compassionate, understanding and respond equally to any student, faculty and staff they encounter.

In this moment, I feel that Maureen has open the door, invited us in to make a difference, make changes, enhance the department in ways that we improve trust collectively and together.