

## Comments by Professor David Abrams for Public Safety Review and Outreach Initiative

August 27, 2020

Thank you to my friends and colleagues, Professors Roberts and Howard, John Hollway and Paul Heaton for coordinating this initiative and inviting me to participate.

I don't have specific expertise on university or private police departments, so the thoughts I share today come from my knowledge of policing more broadly. I am an economist who has been researching criminal justice topics for 2 decades, and in the past decade have served as an expert on policing matters in Los Angeles, Seattle, Milwaukee, among other locations, as well as the Bailey litigation in Philadelphia that Prof. Rudovsky just referred to. My recommendations are based on my research and that of other experts, as well as this personal experience.

What I would like to do is talk about 3 key ingredients that are essential to successful and race-neutral policing: incentives, data, and ongoing university involvement.

### Incentives

It is crucial to have proper incentives for officers, just as it is for any employee. People respond to incentives. When you make pay and promotion dependent on grants, people will get grants. If publications are more important, people write more papers. If teaching ratings are key, teaching will improve.

The same is true for police. If arrests are what is counted, that will be the focus for officers. If it is Terry stops, as it had been for quite some time in Philadelphia and elsewhere, you will see a large number of stops. I would suggest that the **most important thing this initiative can do** is work with the Penn police to determine:

- a) specific performance measures for officers of **all ranks**, and
- b) incentives, both positive and negative, to help achieve those goals. This could include things like vacation days, promotion, public recognition like an officer of the month featured in the Penn Almanac, bonuses, and also warnings, reassignment, dismissal.

The details of the criteria should be determined by a joint committee of students, faculty, staff and police, and put in place by year end. I would suggest at a minimum they should include automatic review of officers and their superiors with a certain number of complaints, unfounded stops, or any shooting incidents.

### Data

In order to reach your goals, you must be able to measure progress. Systematic and thorough data collection is essential to any successful enterprise, policing included. I'm excited that Data Review is the first tab on the website for this initiative and looking forward to seeing the initial results.

Because police departments are responsible to those being policed, this data should be **publicly disseminated** as frequently as possible. Many major cities including Philadelphia now make crime statistics available in almost real-time. I know this because I've collected them for research this summer and put them together at a website <https://citycrimestats.com/> for others to use.

The Penn Police has reported crimes in the Penn Almanac weekly for at least a decade and disseminates real-time crime incident data to anyone who wants it and makes crime data available online. This is to be commended, but now is a time to push further and expand on this data reporting. In addition to crime statistics, the police should report data on:

- Pedestrian stops, pedestrian frisks, pedestrian searches, vehicle stops, vehicle searches, contraband discovery, and arrests ensuing from these stops. This should include demographic information on those detained, including race. This data is available publicly from Philadelphia and a number of other large cities, and should be at Penn if it is not already.
- Data on compliments or complaints against officers, stage of investigation and whether they were upheld. Other misconduct investigations should also be included.
- Any discharge of firearms should be reported regularly with details of the encounter.
- Asset forfeiture

This data should be publicly available online and updated at least weekly.

Video and other data should be audited at least quarterly by an independent auditor and analysis should be made public, and compared to Philadelphia and other large university police forces (if possible).

There are a large number of other improvements that can help police ensure that their policies and practices are aligned with that of the public they police. These include:

- 1) Better training, especially on duty to intervene, de-escalation, and interactions with individuals of a different race
- 2) Less use of lethal weapons
- 3) Recruitment from a broader pool that better represents the policed population
- 4) Greater collaboration with Penn faculty. I know colleagues in the law school and criminology department have worked with the Penn police, but there are those with interests in crime spread across the university, including Wharton, Med School, SSP, Nursing.

- 5) Use this moment of examination as an opportunity to learn about the many aspects of policing that are so hard to study. This can be best done through a collaboration with our faculty to experts in designing and evaluating randomized trials as changes are made.
- 6) Consider making Criminal Law or Procedure classes open to qualified officers; consider co-teaching or guest lectures by officers.
- 7) Give the DPS advisory board real power, including input on discipline and dismissals

### Ongoing University Involvement

It is crucial that there be ongoing input and collaboration with the university at the highest levels. We know from history and have heard from several of the panelists today that this is not the first moment of national focus on policing and race. These moments have come before and attention always dissipates. The university and the public in general must maintain their responsibility of oversight and guidance of public safety on this campus and in this community. This is the moment to ensure that structures are in place to ensure continued vigilance and cooperation between the university and the police.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.