

Public Hearing on Penn Public Safety Review  
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When I was 14, growing up in Mantua, just north of 34<sup>th</sup> and Market, I discovered Penn. I was part of a summer high school program at the School of Engineering and I fell in love with the place that would become a significant part of my life. It did not seem strange to straddle the two worlds of “the Black Bottom” and the Ivy League, until my freshman year as a Penn student when an orientation leader cautioned students not to travel north of Market or west of 40<sup>th</sup>, especially alone. As a commuter, that would be a complicated one to figure out! Yet, I navigated these vastly different worlds, encouraged by proud family, supported by administrators, and cheered on mostly by dining hall and custodial staff, shuttle drivers, and security guards who looked like me. I do not recall any direct experience with Public Safety as a student and so my impression was neither negative nor positive.

I had a relatively isolated experience as a commuter, but I found my way and began my career at Penn after graduation, eventually discovering ways that my work could support the students and programs at Penn. I love Penn and I love Penn people – so much so that I married an alum from the neighborhood, and two of our four children followed in our footsteps as Penn alumni.

My experience with Public Safety has been mostly as a staff member – our daughters did sessions on safety, I toured the command center through the Essentials of Management program, and had many wonderful opportunities to engage with Vice President Mo Rush. Then, as a Penn parent, I was alarmed, but grateful when Public Safety called to advise that my son was injured playing basketball at Pottruck and escorted him to HUP for treatment. I believe many Public Safety staff are devoted professionals who care about the University and its community as I do. But I think there is a disconnect.

Public Safety's mission is to enhance the quality of life, safety and security of our community. These tenets should promote belonging. Both my daughter and son agreed that Public Safety has a strong presence on campus and the surrounding neighborhood but my son especially, expressed a sentiment that mirrors my perception of how Public Safety often engages with people of color from the community on campus – and since there can't always be clarity about the people of color who are from Penn and those who are not, that feeling has been a part of his engagement. This feeling may be rooted in the overall experience of how he is perceived as a young black man in America, in the city of Philadelphia, and yes, at Penn. In my son's words: “I know I'm from Philly, I know I look like I'm more from Philly than from Penn.” So, how did that shape his experience at Penn?

He felt anxious around campus police, and was ultra-conscious of wearing Penn branded clothing especially at night and on weekends, lest he be mistaken for someone

who didn't belong on Locust Walk, jogging on Walnut Street, walking into Houston Hall, sitting outside the Bookstore, you can fill in the blank. As much as he loves West Philly, his time on campus resulted in feelings of often being viewed as out of place and contributed to his reluctance to live in the community when, now no longer a student, he might be perceived as someone who does not belong. I do not believe this is an experience that white people in the Penn community have.

If operating through a lens of suspicion, Public Safety cannot promote a feeling of security at Penn for people of color. I respect many wonderful police, including my late grandfather who was a retired Philadelphia police officer. But Public Safety's alignment and partnership with the Philadelphia police does not necessarily signal an enhanced quality of life or safety for everyone. This is particularly true for black students, like my son, who was unjustifiably stopped on a short walk from 38<sup>th</sup> Street to his room at DuBois in his freshman year. He was asked to have a friend come down to vouch for him, even after showing his PennCard. I worry about the assumption that black people on campus do not "belong." I speak only for the experiences of those closest to me, and admittedly, from the heart of a mother, I know that my son's experience not just with the Philadelphia police while on campus, but also that sense of trepidation when you feel like your belonging could be questioned by a member of the community charged with protecting all Penn citizens, has been articulated by other students and alumni of color. I sincerely hope that any effort to examine the culture and impact of Public Safety especially in relation to people of color, will be viewed in terms of how they affect students and staff, but also, the community of people who are our neighbors – people like the 14-year-old me – people whose paths may lead them to our campus where hopefully, they are welcomed, and where they pursue lifelong connections that benefit us all. Thank you.