

Urbana IDOT Traffic Stop Data Task Force

Community Impact

March 16, 2015

DRAFT Preliminary Report Summary

The State of Illinois requires that police departments collect information on traffic stops for the purpose of identifying racial disparities and profiling in policing. For the second time in four years, the city of Urbana is studying the disparities in traffic stops. In June 2014 Mayor Laurel Prussing appointed an 11 member task force to take a more comprehensive study of traffic stops in the City of Urbana, Illinois.

The Urbana I.D.O.T. Traffic Stop Data Task Force is charged with identifying and studying any racial disparities that may exist in local traffic stop data supplied annually to the City by the Illinois Department of Transportation (I.D.O.T.). The UIDOT Task Force is directed to examine multiple aspects of the traffic stop data, including race, driver age, residence, stop time, stop location, the reason for the stop, vehicle age, and any other information the Task Force finds to be useful. The UIDOT Task Force will also look beyond traffic stop including how disparities in traffic stops may have an impact from an economic, social, physiological, and psychological.

Where the City of Urbana is not Ferguson, Missouri, we can look at the recent U.S. Department of Justice Report (DOJ) to learn that racial bias policing can have a profound effect of police and community relations. Not to mention the tremendous impact from an economic, social, physiological and psychological perspective, primarily on America's communities of color where the greatest disparities exist.

What the DOJ report has revealed is although the impact committee has collected and reviewed hours of research materials, surveys, some preliminary economic impact data, and held a one town hall meeting on February 21, 2015, we have only begun to scratch the surface on what information is necessary in order to provide a complete and thorough report. "We want to get it right."

We want to thank the Mayor, City officials, Human Relations staff Todd Rent, and Anthony Weck for the many hours of service you have provided us with conducting our work thus far. Although the work is not complete your assistance has help to provide us with a more effective and efficient work plan.

Sample of an Economic Impact from DOJ Case

Although the following case happened in Ferguson it has been widely reported that Ferguson is only an example of what is occurring across our country.

DOJ spoke with an African-American woman who has a still-pending case stemming from 2007, when, on a single occasion, she parked her car illegally. She received two citations and a \$151 fine, plus fees. The woman, who experienced financial difficulties and periods of homelessness over several years, was charged with seven Failure to Appear offenses for missing court dates or fine payments on her parking

tickets between 2007 and 2010. For each Failure to Appear, the court issued an arrest warrant and imposed new fines and fees. From 2007 to 2014, the woman was arrested twice, spent six days in jail, and paid \$550 to the court for the events stemming from this single instance of illegal parking. Court records show that she twice attempted to make partial payments of \$25 and \$50, but the court returned those payments, refusing to accept anything less than payment in full. One of those payments was later accepted, but only after the court's letter rejecting payment by money order was returned as undeliverable. This woman is now making regular payments on the fine. As of December 2014, over seven years later, despite initially owing a \$151 fine and having already paid \$550, she still owed \$541.

Urbana Town hall Testimony

Below is a report written by Paul Wood, a reporter for the News-gazette, who attended the town hall meeting on February 21, 2015. Mr. Woods report is a sample of the anecdotal information that was collected on the day of our first town hall.

A number of citizens — not all from Urbana — spoke of feeling they were being discriminated against when stopped by Urbana police officers, whether in a car or on foot.

Longtime activist Martel Miller, who has previously videotaped police interactions, said young people told him, "we don't need help with school; we need help with the police."

He said stepped-up traffic stops on minorities are part of what he described as an unsuccessful war on drugs. "Black people are not the only ones doing drugs," he said. Though several town hall participants said the profiling was mostly aimed at young men, a 30-year veteran of the Champaign County Board was one who spoke up. Lorraine Cowart said she was stopped at least once "just because of my color."

Kathy Wahl of Urbana, who is white, said white members of her family are treated courteously by officers, but her adopted son, Nathan, a 26-year-old special-education major at Eastern Illinois University, was stopped after working at Macy's and having a cup of coffee at Merry Ann's Diner in Champaign. Recently, "They had him stay out in the cold for an hour" on a frigid night without finding anything to charge him with, she said.

In one stop at Crystal Lake Park, officers said they smelled alcohol coming from baby wipes in her son's car. They questioned him about why he had a child's game in the car, she said. They also searched a child's diabetes bag in her son's car, she said.

An example of these types of traffic stops was descriptive and well documented in the book "Pulled Over: How Police Stops Define Race and Citizenship." The book explains the racial disparities and vast differential treatment between safety stops opposed to investigatory stops, and how each stop is experienced by Caucasian and African American drivers. The Caucasian drivers received more safety

stops while the African American drivers experience more investigative stops, because these disparities exist it tends to have negative effects on police and minority relationships.

Expanded scope of work and timeline

The town hall provided the committee with important anecdotal information that will be included in the report but it also revealed more time will be needed to collect information from a variety of sources and focus groups.

Therefore, the committee will expand its scope of work to include the following activities and timeline:

First, a ride along has been scheduled on March 27th. Second, in the next couple of weeks the committee will observe traffic court proceedings and conduct on the spot interviews. Third, a review of fees and fines, and repo's, will be assessed. Fourth, focus groups will be convened in mid-April and, finally a series of meetings will be held with staff, and committee members to review and compile all the data into a final report by the end June.

Committee Request

It was agreed by the committee of the whole at our February meeting to request from the Council additional time to complete our final report. Although it is the intent of the committee to try to meet our April deadline, due to the extensive amount of work of the impact committee has yet to accomplish the chair is asking for an additional four-six weeks to complete our final report.