



FACT SHEET: Data Reporting on Long Island Police Stops

Data about law enforcement activity can be a powerful and effective tool in reforming policing and criminal justice practices. Improved data collection and reporting are essential to better understanding the severity and impact of discriminatory policing and making the case for reform. Although Suffolk County is collecting some demographic data under Federal order, that data is not publicly available; Nassau collects no data at all.

BACKGROUND

In the national conversation on just and accountable community policing, both sides agree that “high-quality, detailed data is paramount for effective decision making.”¹ Comprehensive collection and dissemination of data – on the purpose of police-community interactions, the demographics and circumstances of the community members involved, and the outcomes of those interactions – can allow police departments and community advocates to start from a common factual understanding.

For police, such data can be an invaluable tool to better understand patterns of crime and better deploy resources. For community members, access to such high-quality data can reveal patterns of ineffective or even unconstitutional police tactics. In both cases, data collection and reporting is a central element of building trust between police and community.

Despite the tremendous power of such data, there is no uniform national standard for capturing and publicizing stop-, summons- and arrest-related data. According to a recent study by the Washington Post, fewer than three percent of the nation’s 18,000 state and local police agencies reported fatal shootings by their officers to the FBI’s voluntary national database.²

In localities where it has been introduced, including New York City, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, comprehensive collection and reporting has helped win substantive police accountability and helped departments effectively address biased tactics, rebuilding community trust.³

WHERE WE ARE NOW

A 2015 report by President Obama’s Task Force on Twenty-First Century Policing showed an unusual degree of agreement from all parties on the

importance of reliable data collection and publication.⁴ In New York City, which began publishing data on stop, question, and frisk interactions under court order in 2008, the release of that data has correlated with a dramatic decrease – down by 75% – in the use of a tactic which had been applied disproportionately to young black men.

At the New York State legislature, Assemblymember Joseph Lentol has worked with civil rights advocates including the New York Civil Liberties Union to introduce a bill that would mandate reporting by police departments statewide along a number of key data points, including racial and demographic information on arrests and all arrest-related deaths.

Despite this growing national and statewide movement for common-sense reporting practices, and a history of discriminatory policing practices on Long Island, little has happened here. The Suffolk County Police Department, which is now under federal oversight following an investigation of their conduct after the 2008 hate-killing of Ecuadorean immigrant Marcelo Lucero, is mandated to capture data related to “racially sensitive policing issues,” including traffic stops and hate crimes, but has not made the data publicly available.⁵ In Nassau County, there is no standard for data collection or reporting.

WHERE WE’RE GOING

Laws requiring the collection of data about law enforcement interactions – including with whom, why, and how – are essential to setting a baseline standard of police-community accountability and rebuilding a fragile trust. Such data collection standards can be imposed by court order or local legislative action, but they can just easily be accomplished through departmental action. When local police leadership is committed to collaborative

relationship with community members and civil rights advocates, comprehensive collection and common-sense reporting standards are a logical next step. Some of the hallmarks of reform include:

- **Collect key demographics.** It should be mandatory to collect data for age, race and/or ethnicity, and sex/gender of individuals in police interactions as well as the date, time, location and geographic location where the interaction took place. Data should be self-reported to ensure accuracy, and should include all manner of interactions, including stops, frisks, searches, summonses, use of force, arrests, and deaths.
- **Require an explanation.** The reason for the law enforcement action at each stage of police contact should be required as part of the data collection statute, including whether contraband was found.
- **Report to the public.** All data, including geo-mapping of stops, disaggregated by demographics, type of interaction, and departmental (or, when available, officer's) history, should be made easily accessible on a website which is available to the public and is regularly updated. Protecting the privacy of those stopped needs to be considered in the sharing of data.

References

1. Police Chief Magazine, *Importance of Quality, Timely, and Detailed Incident Data: Lessons from the Seattle Police Department.* June 2014. <http://bit.ly/1Lw46EI>
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3. Sunlight Foundation. *Stop and frisk in 4 cities: The importance of open police data.* March 2, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1J9TYzC>
4. Sunlight Foundation. *What do we want? Data about police practice!* January 22, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1USNVX8>
5. Long Island Report. *Federal oversight for Suffolk police in Lucero probe.* December 19, 2013. <http://bit.ly/1OU9CEi>