Crime Research Group, Inc.
PO Box 1433
Montpelier, VT 05601

Voice: 802.230.4768
Email: info@crgvt.org
Website: www.crgvt.org

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Karen Gennette, Executive Director, Crime Research Group
Testimony on Fair and Impartial Policing
Date: February 8, 2017

Data Collection:

1. Under Act 147, CRG was selected as the repository for the traffic stop and race data by VCJTC. Ninety percent of the agencies have sent in their data. The data sets will be posted on Friday, February 10, 2017. Each agency's data will be posted in a separate excel spreadsheet. Because the data sets provided by law enforcement agencies were from two different records management systems, it wasn't possible to collapse the data into one statewide data set

2. Also posted on the website will be a list of Factors Affecting the Validity of the Data:
    a. Number of people stopped vs number of tickets: The traffic stop counts in the data as submitted by departments are for tickets and warnings not people or stops. A police officer may give out more than one ticket per stop which can be miscalculated as number of people stopped.
    b. Non-discretionary stops: Tickets and warnings issued as the result of crashes, marijuana tickets, under-age drinking tickets, and externally generated stops may be included in the data sets as if they were discretionary (e.g. a crash may have been coded as a moving violation).
    c. Numbers too small for analysis: In many of the spreadsheets, the numbers of stops for operators of color are too small for valid analysis of the data.
    d. Non-standardization of data entry and coding: Data entry and coding in the law enforcement data collection systems have not been standardized, and officer training on how to enter data has not been available therefore some percentage of the data may be inaccurate.
    e. Timeframe: Not all data was extracted for the same timeframe.
    f. Missing data: Data was frequently missing from tickets (e.g. race was not coded), or more than one box was checked in a category. Tickets or warnings issued to a company (i.e. commercial motor vehicle stops) were missing data, including age and gender of the driver.
    g. Non-audited data: Data include improperly coded tickets by police officers and have not been checked for accuracy.

    In spite of these issues, getting started and addressing these concerns are very important and this gives a roadmap for improving the quality of law enforcement data.

3. Some agencies were unable to extract the data primarily for three reasons: lack of staff, lack of funding, and lack of information/knowledge about how to do the extraction. For example, one agency informed me that they had 800 tickets and 2600 warnings and one staff person – the staff person had time to enter the tickets but not the warnings.

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Karen Gennette, Executive Director, Crime Research Group
Testimony on Fair and Impartial Policing
Date: February 8, 2017

Data Analysis:

4. Through a Bureau of Justice Statistic's grant, CRG is doing an analysis of traffic stop and race data using Central Connecticut State University's methodologies. The data collected by Connecticut is the most detailed and comprehensive of any state in the country. The analysis is the most sophisticated effort conducted on a statewide basis for all local police departments.

5. Researchers in the criminal justice field have long been in agreement that using census data is not adequate to estimate the racial composition of the driving population. (eg: the population of a town is different than the population that drives through or to a town, seasonal drivers, workers commuting to a town/city).

6. Analyses that CRG will conduct:
    a. Commuting population – Burlington example: 26,000 people commute daily to Burlington for work. This changes the population of the city and impacts traffic stops.
    b. Veil of Darkness – natural experiment using summer and winter hours at twilight – 6pm in the summer is light, 6pm in the winter is dark and in general the driving population should remain constant. Stops during these periods should also remain constant.

7. Disparity in the data does not equal bias – bias is one reason for disparities. In order to gain a fuller picture more analysis needs to be done to explore the disparities. Some LE officers have provided information on strategies they've used that have impacted their personal results (i.e. giving out tickets to those going over 90 on the interstate). This is not to explain away any bias that is occurring but to give a fuller picture of what's happening in Vermont communities.

8. It's continues to be important to understand the stories behind the data (or lack of data) – RBA.