

Review of Initiatives of the Vermont State Police (VSP) Related to Fair and Impartial Policing Practices:

The VSP continues our commitment to fair and impartial policing & to policing driven by our agency's vision of fairness, compassion and service.

I want to make sure that folks understand that fair and impartial policing is a fundamental principle to us because we are entrusted as guardians. Therefore, this work is not going to end after a certain amount of time has passed. This is on-going because it is our job to protect people, to ensure people's rights, and to maintain public trust through fair, impartial, reasonable and compassionate policing in Vermont.

There is no place for abuse of authority or unfair treatment of people by police. Any police actions or inactions based on harmful stereotyping or biases about race, gender, age, socio-economic status, physical or mental ability, and so forth, would be unjust, unsafe and ineffective.

Our high standards are ensured through our rigorous hiring and training process, strong department policies, and our internal investigation process, which handles any allegations of misconduct and is overseen by a commission of citizens.

Our department policy on fair and impartial policing has been held up as a model, as has our internal affairs process.

I want to touch upon some of our recent efforts:

- 1) **Director of Fair and Impartial Policing and Community Affairs:** A new position at the rank of captain was created in spring 2016, charged with developing and implementing comprehensive programs to ensure that fair and impartial policing practices are integrated at all levels of the state police. My duties in this position include working with commanders across the state to integrate these principles and programs.
- 2) **Enhanced community outreach:** We established a new strategic plan for the entire department. From that, each station commander is developing barracks goals centered on building deeper relationships of trust and understanding with a diverse range of citizens and groups. We intend to build stronger relationships with communities of color, domestic and sexual assault survivors, advocates, the mental health service-users' community, the LGBTQ community, and so forth.

We are changing our own culture and priorities while increasing our accessibility as an agency.

- 3) **The Fair and Impartial Policing Committee:** Since the early 2000s this has been an advisory board to the Colonel with a mission of supporting efforts to promote fair and impartial policing. The committee is comprised of Vermont police partnered with leaders of diverse communities. This last year after some of the data studies were complete, the committee was re-energized. Sub-committees were formed to focus in key areas such as improved data quality, recruitment, and community outreach efforts.
- 4) **Recruitment and hiring:** We are committed to establishing a membership representative of the communities we serve and which employs best practices in fair and impartial policing. As a department, we value and understand diversity to be strength. Innovative recruitment, selection of competent applicants and training for new troopers are at the foundation of our efforts to ensure fair and impartial policing. I work closely with our Recruitment and Training Division to ensure prospective members have strong knowledge and understanding of national issues related to policing, awareness about bias, and the relationship between police and the communities we serve.
- 5) **Training:** There is a lot of discussion about the various forms of bias and how it may impact police actions. As human beings each one of us has unconscious mindsets and biases about people, places and things. We essentially fear what is not known or understood, and this has roots in a history of racism, sexism and homophobia in this country. We cannot deny or ignore that. As public servants we have an obligation to cognitively address and correct these types of errors in thinking. Training plays a critical role in reducing the impact of bias on behavior. Research has found that when we become aware, we become motivated and able to implement un-biased behaviors.

We are ensuring our membership is effectively trained, to ensure fair and impartial policing practices within each of the three divisions of the VSP. Over the past four months we trained every member from the rank of recruit through captain by reviewing and discussing our department policy, state law, data studies, and training to standardize data collection. We discussed bias, the perception of its practice, and how it impacts our profession.

Future department training will include providing supervision around FIP to line supervisors, and training to improve decisions-making around car searches.

We provide six hour training to new troopers before they begin in the field. Our training partners combine the traditional scientific research approach with a social identities approach to understanding implicit bias, leadership coaching, and ongoing professional development to enhance fair and impartial policing. Participants explore how self-identity and implicit bias informs decisions about who gets stopped, how they are questioned, searched, ticketed or warned. This engages us to have the difficult dialogues that provide opportunities for personal growth and understanding.

Data: We are grateful for what we are learning from studies of our traffic stop activity. We cannot turn away from the fact that studies consistently showed racial disparities in our car stops and searches; most notably, our searches from 2010 through 2015. These disparities grew over the 5 year period. The numbers showed that we searched Black motorists and Hispanic motorists at higher rates than we searched White and Asian motorists. At the same time, we learned that while we have very high overall hits for contraband (78% of our searches resulted in finding contraband) we find more contraband when we search white and Asian drivers (80%) than when we search Black and Hispanic drivers (63-68%).

To be clear, searches that result in zero contraband findings should not be mistaken for erroneous or improper searches. Grounds to conduct a search are based on defined standards set in law, such as probable cause or reasonable suspicion. But, when data show that we make significantly more findings when we search a group whom the data show we tend to search less often, we need to listen and re-assess. Searches can take up to an hour or more, and require more than one trooper on scene. From a practical standpoint alone, we don't want to waste time that could otherwise be spent responding to crime and serving the public's safety needs.

As you know, we were proactive in 2009 and contracted with Northeastern University for their expertise in data analysis. We then collected and shared 5 years of raw traffic stop data, before doing so was state law. In 2016 we also worked with Stephanie Seguno from UVM, who joined our FIP committee when her own analysis of VSP data in June of 2016 showed the same sort of findings as the Northeastern study.

We will continue to use data to learn meaningful things about patterns and trends regarding stops and searches. For the past 8 months since the studies, we have been examining aspects of the data and using the analyses to help us determine what needs to change or improve.

We are working hard to make sure the data we provide is accurate so that the outcomes can tell us something factual about our traffic work. We found we made several major conceptual errors from the start, which resulted in mistakes in both coding and entering. I have shared

these findings with the FIP committee, Dr. Seguino, and Northeastern. Correcting these has been a large part of recent training.

Debating the elements of data studies could become a distraction away from the critical issue, which is to ensure fair practices. We do not wish to be viewed as being in opposition to entities sharing our common goal, though we do support mutual understanding and more collaboration between those collecting data, and those analyzing data. (Benchmarking is an example, as are data collected erroneously which incorrectly appeared as discretionary stops in the raw data.)

We plan to post our 2016 raw data on our website in the next 10 days.

Supervision and Accountability: Over the past several months commanders have been meeting with individual members of the department whose data indicated they stopped minority drivers at a rate higher than their representation in the population. The meetings have been productive and the members for the most part have remained curious and open to these inquiries.

These meetings are shaping what will be an early intervention system that supervisors will control at the barracks level.

We are also providing assistance to smaller agencies, and we wish to provide leadership in this area.

Those were just a few examples our how our commitment is shaping the direction of the department.

Moving forward: We need understanding that this is a process; a cultural change, not a one-time event. We are underway, but progress takes time. Instant gratification is not likely. We need your support and your input, and you can have confidence in knowing that we are not going to let go of this vision.