

Reimagining the Role of Police Stops in Public Safety

A White Paper Informed by a Workshop Series on Reducing Harm through Research, Policy, and Practice

Georgetown Law's Center for Innovation in Community Safety
Howard University
The Lab @ DC
December 2022

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following individuals for their invaluable contributions to this white paper: Camilla Brandfield-Harvey, Katie Gan, Christy Lopez, Karissa Minnich, Bahiyyah Muhammad, Sam Quinney, Anita Ravishankar, and Reginald Young-Drake. They reviewed a substantial suite of audio, visual, and written materials generated by the workshop series to ensure comprehensive documentation of the insights shared over seven sessions. We are grateful for your assistance in developing this paper. The content of this paper would not be possible if not for the valuable insight, research and expertise of those who participated in the workshop series:¹

David Abrams | Penn Law
Frank Baumgartner | UNC-Chapel Hill
Stephen Benson | DC MPD
Camilla Brandfield-Harvey | Georgetown Law
Paul Butler | Georgetown Law
Nicholas Camp | University of Michigan
Ashley Carter | Advancement Project
Darius Charney | Center for Constitutional Rights
Puneet Cheema | NAACP Legal Defense Fund
Robert Contee | DC MPD
Christian Davenport | University of Michigan
Mike Davis | Northeastern University
Ron Davis | President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing
DeMarcus Edwards | Melanin Coalition
Charles Epp | University of Kansas
Jeffrey Fagan | Columbia Law School
Eduardo Ferrer | Georgetown Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative
Paul Figueroa | Oakland Police Department
Lynda Garcia | Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights
Delonte Gholston | PeaceWalksDC and Peace Fellowship Church*
Jessica Gillooly | Policing Project at NYU School of Law
Jack Glaser | UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy
Sharad Goel | Stanford Computational Policy Lab
Phillip Atiba Goff | Center for Policing Equity and Yale University
Ben Haiman | DC MPD
Andrea Headley | Georgetown University
Kristin Henning | Georgetown Law
LaShunda Hill | Students in the Care of DC*
Danielle Holley-Walker | Howard University School of Law
Karima Holmes | DC Office of Unified Communications
Monica Hopkins | ACLU of the District of Columbia
Hakeem Jefferson | Stanford University
Tracie Keese | Center for Policing Equity
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Christy Lopez | Georgetown Law*
Chris Magnus | Tucson Police Department
Del McFadden | DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement
Tracey Meares | Yale University
Roger Mitchell | DC Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice
Paul Monteiro | Howard University
Bahiyyah Muhammad | Howard University Graduate School
Jonathan Mummolo | Princeton University
Peter Newsham | DC MPD
Rebba Omer | Georgetown Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative
Felix Owusu | DC MPD, The Lab @ DC, & Harvard University
Michael Perloff | ACLU of the District of Columbia
Robert Pittman | MPD Citizens Advisory Council
Natasha Pratt-Harris | Morgan State University
Sam Quinney | The Lab @ DC
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Elsie Scott | Howard University
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Antonio Thomas | Melanin Coalition
Michael Tobin | DC Office of Police Complaints
Talhia Tuck | Georgetown Law
William Treanor | Georgetown Law
James VanderMeer | DC MPD
Vesla Weaver | Johns Hopkins University
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Setareh Yelle | DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

¹ Affiliations listed as of the time of the workshop series. This list includes the Workshop speakers, facilitators, and those participants who granted us permission to list their names publicly. The Workshop also benefited from the contributions of participants who chose to not share their names here.

* Member of the DC Police Reform Commission (though not participating in the Workshop that capacity)

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Executive Summary

In September 2019, DC's Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) released a report documenting stops made by its officers from July-August 2019.² The report provided a summary of the first four weeks of data collected under full implementation of a new policy governing stops and stop data collection. The data showed significant racial disparities in stops and subsequent searches, leading MPD to call for further research on whether the racial disparities observed in the data are indicative of bias. A team initially led by Georgetown University Law's Center for Innovation in Community Safety³ and The Lab @ DC in the DC's Office of the City Administrator began planning a convening of experts and community members to identify opportunities and methodologies to answer this call.

Months later, the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police sparked nationwide protests and conversations on the potential harm of police stops. Moreover, they sparked a broader reckoning with the legacy of structural racism in the United States. This tragedy underscored the need for a community conversation.

Georgetown University, The Lab @ DC, and Howard University, then came together to host *Reimagining the Role of Police Stops in Public Safety: A Workshop Series on Reducing Harm through Research, Policy, and Practice*. This multi-day convening in the Fall of 2020 leveraged the lived and technical experience of community members, advocates, researchers, and police practitioners to 1) explore the costs and benefits of police stops with the explicit goal of limiting stops and reducing the harm of those made; 2) identify best practices to measure bias in police stops; and 3) recommend policy solutions to address identified issues in Washington, DC and around the country.

Across seven workshops, participants engaged with police and community perspectives on the benefits and harms of stops; on the current state of research methods to measure bias in policing; on research conducted to date broader harms and benefits of stops; on opportunities for future research that leverage new data and technology to learn more about what happens in these interactions and why; and, to consider policy solutions that reduce harm while ensuring public safety. This white paper summarizes the presentations and discussions of 130 participants over seven workshops. It also synthesizes their conclusions, which include:

“Data don’t speak. We make them speak”- Phil Goff. Data collection is painstaking but vital, and we must do justice by employing the proper analyses. Simplistic analyses mislead policymakers.

Research into police stops must be community-centered to help avoid the errors and omissions of previous research efforts. Community partners need to be involved early in the research process to ensure their perspectives are reflected in how we treat results.

A police stop’s impact is bigger than the stop itself. Every stop carries with it the historical baggage of biased policing and, for many, the trauma of past experiences with policing. The burden of the stop, even where it does not lead to a citation, search, arrest, or use of force, stays with a person long after the stop has ended, resulting in anxiety, post-traumatic stress

² Metropolitan Police Department (2019) [Stop Data Report](#). Washington, DC. September 2019.

³ Formerly the Innovative Policing Program

disorder (PTSD), as well as poor physical health and academic performance. Further, stops affect the communities in which they occur, leading to civic disengagement.

Reimagining stops requires us to reimagine policing. The current use of police stops is deeply intertwined with the current over-reliance on police to “do everything.” Reducing the harm of stops, while increasing their effectiveness, thus requires identifying non-law enforcement solutions to keep communities safe and healthy.

Changing officer perspectives on stops requires us to rethink police accountability and reward systems. We need to abandon the formal and informal emphasis on stops that encourage them as a primary performance metric. We need new measures of officer success that take into account community vitality and health.

At the close of the workshop, these ideas were presented to District leaders in the Metropolitan Police Department, Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, and the Office of Unified Communication responsible for the 911 Call Center. Workshop hosts committed to documenting these conversations and recommendations in this white paper, [Sample Learning Agendas](#), and a set of [Policy Considerations for Reducing Harm](#) for the District and other jurisdictions nationally.

Workshop One: What Are Police and Community Perspectives on Stops?

In workshop one, participants focused on how officers and the public view the harms and benefits of police stops through a keynote, panel-led discussions, and small group conversations.

Danielle Holley-Walker, Howard University School of Law; Peter Newsham, DC Metropolitan Police Department (MPD); and William Treanor, Georgetown Law made introductory remarks. Holley-Walker stressed the dramatic effect of police stops on DC's African American community, and on those who are members of the Howard community specifically. Newsham underscored this concern noting that 72% of MPD's stops are of African Americans. The group discussed the need to rebuild trust between Black and Latino communities and the police practitioners they regularly encounter; and they expressed gratitude for the participants assembled to begin the work of reimagining stops.

A Keynote Conversation About Police Stops

- Paul Butler | Albert Brick Professor of Law, Georgetown Law
- Robert Contee | Assistant Chief of the Investigative Services Bureau,⁴ Metropolitan Police Department

Butler and Contee opened the series by sharing their personal and professional experiences that led them to work in public safety, as well as their experiences as Black men navigating the criminal justice system as victims, investigators, and prosecutors of crime. They discussed the far-ranging impacts of police stops, from the impacts on interpersonal relationships and mental health in the communities where stops take place to the impacts on democracy more broadly. Butler explained that, because of police officers' discretion to conduct stops and power to choose who to stop, the choice to stop Black people more often than white people can rankle community members and wear thin the trust between citizens and police, affecting the overall efficiency of policing and the safety of communities.

Contee and Butler emphasized that gun violence is a public health epidemic that will not be solved with arrests and prosecution. They discussed how police are a very physical representation of the government, and negative interactions—such as stops—can discourage civic engagement such as serving on juries or voting. Butler questioned the goal of stops, stating that if stops are intended to reduce crime, but only one percent of stops result in the recovery of a gun, perhaps stops are not the solution. Contee and Butler concluded that communities need to decide what changes to make to discretionary stops so that police departments are serving communities without alienating them.

Police Point-of-View Panel-Led Discussion

- Ron Davis | Executive Director, President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing
- Stephen Benson | Officer, DC MPD
- Paul Figueroa | Captain of Police, Oakland Police Department
- Tracie Keesee | Senior VP of Justice Initiatives and Co-Founder, Center for Policing Equity

⁴ Contee was sworn in as Acting Chief of Police on January 2, 2021, and officially confirmed Chief on May 4, 2021.

- Chris Magnus | Chief, Tucson Police Department
- James VanderMeer | Officer, DC MPD

Davis led the first panel by discussing the harms and benefits of stops from a law enforcement perspective. The panel highlighted that stops can be reasonable, polite, and a public service, but that, even so, they collectively can cause tremendous trauma for communities already burdened by other social inequalities.

To avoid these burdens, Magnus stressed that jurisdictions need to rethink policing as a whole; “we teach cops from day one that an arrest reduces crime. Until we start changing that mentality... things aren’t going to dramatically change.” The group outlined alternatives to the broad use of discretionary stops, ranging from using data to refine hotspot policing and focusing on known individuals to retraining officers to ensure productive behaviors are mirrored by leadership and incentivized in performance reviews. Keesee reinforced the latter with her experience at the New York Police Department (NYPD): “There needs to be an alignment between what is taught in the academy and what is happening when you’re on duty with your fellow officers,” and, in some cases, that will require a retraining of officers to balance stops with a sincere focus on a community’s needs and desires.

The group also addressed nuisance complaints and “suspicious person” calls as a source of harmful stops. Figueroa introduced the concept of the “chain of bias” that can start when such a complaint is made and then work its way through the 911 call taker to the dispatcher and ultimately to the officer. “Every step along that path can pick up bias,” shared Figueroa. He described Oakland’s response to train 911 call takers to ask probing questions of callers and use these calls as educational opportunities to minimize harmful outcomes. From the perspective of an officer, Benson shared that, when officers understand the history of the area they’re policing and the role of gentrification in nuisance and suspicious person calls, officers approach these calls differently. “I’ll call the citizen back to get more information,” he said, “because the last thing I want to do is use my uniform to support the caller’s bias.” Benson stated that he makes very few self-initiated stops and most are from warrants or calls for service. VanderMeer stated that the demographics of his own stops and arrests could appear biased at first glance, but that is just a result of working in a predominantly black community.

Community Point-of-View Panel-Led Discussion

- Kristin Henning | Blume Professor of Law and Director of the Juvenile Justice Clinic and Initiative, Georgetown Law
- DeMarcus Edwards | Member, Melanin Coalition
- Monica Hopkins | Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of the District of Columbia
- Brenda Richardson | President, Chozen Consulting, LLC
- Bridgette Stumpf, | Executive Director and Co-Founder, Network for Victim Recovery of DC
- Patrice Sulton | Founder and Executive Director, DC Justice Lab | DC Police Reform Commission

Henning led panelists Edwards, Hopkins, Richardson, Stumpf, and Sulton in a discussion on community perspectives of stops.

The group shared how stops can be terrifying and sometimes violent encounters for those who are stopped and their communities. “Even when the officer is being cordial, that blue uniform carries a

history of so much more,” Henning noted. Stumpf echoed the sentiment, explaining that if your parents teach you to fear the police, then even a mundane interaction with them can be traumatic. Edwards provided a personal example of how he, as a Black man, is repeatedly shown that his personhood is undervalued when he is stopped for behavior that his white neighbors are not stopped for. He described his hands getting sweaty, fidgeting with his fingers, and feeling “a sense of unease, which I understand everyone doesn’t feel when they talk to the police.” Hopkins pointed out that Edward’s nervous behaviors—his physiological response to the presence of police—can breed suspicion in the officer making the stop. Further, every time a stop like this happens, there is an entire community witnessing and learning from that interaction.

Henning then asked the panel, “Who feels like the police work for them?” Richardson started by describing how police presence brings her, a Black woman, both trauma and relief: “I live in Ward 8. People like me are born to fear the police.” At the same time, she feels a sense of safety when a police car sits on her corner. Stumpf elaborated on this tension, pointing out that society creates a false binary of perfect victim and wrongful perpetrator that results in victims of color failing to report a crime because they fear they won’t be treated fairly or believed. The discussion underscored that community views on stops and policing more broadly are not monolithic—even within a single person, let alone a single neighborhood block.

Breakout Group Discussions

Participants separated into smaller groups for breakout discussions. Breakout groups were assigned so that each included participants with varying perspectives: community, advocacy, research, and law enforcement and facilitators emphasized that no one is just one identity or label. To allow the conversations to build, participants remained in the same breakout groups for the duration of the Workshop. Each group began with similar prompts which were then adjusted by the facilitators in response to the participants. Appendix B includes the virtual “whiteboards” from each of the breakout groups’ discussions.

Participants got to know each other, build trust, and begin sharing their own experiences with police stops. They also reflected on what they heard during the day—“aha!” moments and things that surprised them. Many participants mentioned hearing perspectives that hadn’t previously occurred to them: whether it was how police officers felt about making stops or how Black community members felt about being stopped. Some talked about communication and perception gaps, like a participant who said, “What stood out to me was the difference between how the [police] and [community] panels see the exact same thing, but [interpret it] differently.” Most discussions touched on the importance of community voices being reflected in stops policy. Some pointed to the need to move from discussions of individual officer behavior to think more broadly about systemic policies, such as whether discretionary stops are worthwhile and whether other approaches may be more effective in reducing violent crime and gun violence.

Workshop Two: What Experiences Inform Our Views on Stops? Where Are Our Blind Spots?

In workshop two, participants engaged with the role data plays in informing our understanding and decision making on police stops and then met in their breakout rooms for further small group discussion.

Keynote: Justice Through Analysis: More Than Data on Racism in Policing

- Phil Goff | Co-founder and CEO, Center for Policing Equity | Professor of African-American Studies and Psychology, Yale University

Goff recalled a comment from a police chief once made to him: “If policing is supposed to protect people, then American policing has been profoundly broken in Black communities for generations.” Yet, Goff posed to participants the idea that bad people are not the cause of problems in policing. He stressed that, “Policing is a neighborhood event—not encounter by encounter.” He argued that we need to know when to hold individual officers accountable, when to hold agencies accountable, and when recognize that the problem is outside law enforcement and therefore hold cities accountable. “We so often hold law enforcement accountable for things they can’t fix,” he stressed. “Instead, we need to recognize that racism—the pattern and power of stereotyping, prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, and bias—plays out not just in individual encounters, but at the community and city levels as well.”

Goff pointed to data, but more importantly the appropriate analytical framework, as the key to helping distinguish between random acts and chronic discrimination. He pointedly said, “I care a lot less about data, than I do analysis. Data don’t speak. We make them speak.” He acknowledged that data (e.g., crime statistics and demographics of those involved in various police interactions, officer and community attitudes etc.) can be very challenging to collect, but that taking a data-driven approach benefits all parties. Goff explained that police like this approach because it doesn’t solely place blame on them, communities like it because it acknowledges their challenges beyond policing, and it makes racial justice work bipartisan.

Breakout Group Discussions: Harms and Benefits of Stops

In breakout groups, participants expanded on the harms and benefits of stops.

Perceived harms named included physical injury and death, as well as psychological anxiety and trauma for the resident, their community, and the officer. Participants explained that stops can erode community-police trust only to further negative stereotypes of police and discourage civic engagement. Breakout groups identified that some stops can be beneficial like a stop for drunk driving, but each stop has an opportunity cost—time police could spend on other community activities—so if stops are not what communities want, then tax dollars are being wasted.

Deterrents of crime, protecting community safety, and reaffirming procedural justice were all named by participants as perceived benefits of police stops. Groups noted that stops can provide an opportunity for officers to educate the public and demonstrate their responsiveness, as well as serve as a helpful investigative tool in solving crime.

Breakout Group Discussions: Reducing Harms and Balancing Benefits

After lunch, participants then discussed policy suggestions to balance these harms and benefits. Ideas included pairing officers with a mental health professional on calls; rethinking officer hiring criteria such as minimum required education, age, and/or years of experience; and making changes to officer training that emphasize options beyond the highest justifiable use of force. Building a trusting relationship between officers and community was echoed from earlier panels (e.g., including community in Police Academy training), as was reframing measures of officer success.

Workshop Three: Measuring Bias and Discrimination

In the first session of the day, participants heard from academic researchers on methodological challenges related to measuring racial bias and discrimination. Panelists described the complexity of the data-generating process and cautioned participants on the limitations of police administrative data as an impartial source of information for decision-making.⁵ They also discussed lessons from other jurisdictions.

The Denominator Problem Panel-Led Discussion

- Christopher Winship | Diker-Tishman Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Harvard University
- Dean Knox, |Assistant Professor in Operations, Information, and Decisions, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania
- Jonathan Mummolo | Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs, Department of Politics, School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University

The panel discussed the complexity of the data collection process, data's inherent constraints, and the shortcomings of oft-used methods of analysis. Winship pointed out that recognizing a racial disparity exists doesn't tell us what *causes* the disparity, including whether it is caused by active prejudice. "If we think of discrimination as when similar individuals, who are similarly situated, are not treated in the same way, we need to be very careful about how we define 'similarity,'" Winship cautioned. He emphasized that the conventional methods we use to measure disparities—benchmark analyses that compare stop rates by race to population rates or crime rates—are overly simplistic and can lead to both over- and under-estimating disparities. For example, if hit rates—how often a stop results in an arrest—are lower for one racial group, then disparate outcomes exist, but *we don't know their entry point*. In this instance, discrimination may arise from individual behavior and/or systemic, structural issues. If hit rates are equal across racial groups, discrimination could be absent, but it also could be concealed. In another example, Winship explained that decreasing the footprint of the criminal justice system may mean that fewer people of color are affected but may not necessarily decrease racial disparities—and could even increase them. Ultimately, Winship warned that data without context can be dangerously misleading.

Knox and Mummolo offered a causal framework for measuring police bias that better accounts for the limitations of police data collection. They walked participants through the many constraints of policing data, noting that data are generated through a complex, multi-step, process—and that that process is only partially observed in the data itself. This process begins even before a particular police-citizen encounter—for example, with decisions to deploy police to particular locations—and continues through a long chain, all the way through prosecution decisions and downstream consequences. They noted that race can play a role in each part of that multi-stage process, so analyses must account for each of those stages in order to estimate racial bias correctly. Unfortunately, they find that much of the previous statistical analysis and academic research of policing data oversimplifies this process, and in doing so, reaches the wrong conclusions, with grave consequences for both our knowledge of policing and for policymaking. Existing methods, such as benchmark tests or naive regressions using police records, can

⁵ Throughout this section, we use the word "bias" to mean racial bias, as differentiated from statistical bias. We note that

lead researchers using the same dataset to come to contradictory conclusions. Knox provided a few examples of how widely used methods can lead to incorrect findings:

- Counting events of interest: Simply counting the outcome of interest (e.g., fatal police shootings) for white and Black populations and comparing those figures—without accounting for the bias that took place earlier in the chain of events (e.g., in the decision to patrol or stop) or other factors that led to those encounters—can lead to erroneous conclusions.
- Benchmark tests: These tests turn on what benchmarks are used, and if those are correctly estimated. Using the demographics of the population as benchmarks, for example, may not capture the true item of interest, which is the rate at which police encounter civilians of different backgrounds or characteristics.
- Studying only police records: Police records reflect administrative reporting requirements. When there is an encounter, but no stop, we rarely have a record of that interaction, so we are unable to record the rate of encounters that should actually be the denominator in our calculations of racial bias. Data from police records alone present an incomplete sample because it is based on who police choose to engage, rather than the full sample of encounters.

Mummolo provided an overview of novel statistical methods—statistical bias correction and bounding techniques—he developed with Knox (and Dr. Will Lowe) to account for post-treatment selection. As an example, when Mummolo and Knox applied their bounding approach in replicating an earlier study of racial bias in the use of force, they found that the original study seriously underestimated the number of instances of discriminatory force by a factor of four. Though the methodology presented relies on some strong assumptions, it offers significant improvements over traditional estimators that can seriously underestimate statistical bias.

Getting Measurement Right: What Can We Learn from Other Jurisdictions? Panel-Led Discussion

- Andrea Headley | Assistant Professor, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University
- Sharad Goel | Assistant Professor, Department of Management Science and Engineering, Stanford University | Founder and Director, Stanford Computational Policy Lab
- Frank Baumgartner | Richard J. Richardson Distinguished Professor, Department of Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Felix Owusu | Data Scientist, MPD | Fellow, The Lab @ DC | Research Fellow and Doctoral Candidate, Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Headley kicked off by asking panelists what actionable lessons they have learned in their research on policing. First, panelists stressed the responsibility researchers have to the communities they enter into. For Owusu, this meant recognizing that policing data is situated in a lived, community experience and requires researchers to engage communities early in the research process. Goel expanded on that responsibility, saying that academics should talk directly to journalists, council members, and community members long before the results stage of research and that they should write findings with

an eye towards advocacy organizations and community groups, not just academic publication that few people will read.

Goel, Baumgartner, and Owusu presented their research findings demonstrating the extent of bias in stops in Nashville, North Carolina, and Massachusetts (respectively). Baumgartner shared that, when searching for the factors that determine who is stopped “it’s not only the characteristics of the driver that matter, but also those of the officer.”

Next, panelists discussed how to collect and monitor data without further “burdening” police. While user-centered design was presented by some panelists as a solution for simplifying collection and promoting accuracy, other panelists argued that the frame of “burden” was wrong. They argued that data collection is a core part of an officer’s job, and by requiring additional data collection (i.e., paperwork) around stops, we may incentivize officers to be more judicious in the stops they make.

Workshop Four: What Do We Know Today, and How Do We Measure It?

Workshop Four included a discussion of existing research on police stops and a large group discussion on making stops safer and more effective.

What Does the Research Say About the Effects of Stops? Panel-Led Discussion

- Vesla Weaver | Bloomberg Distinguished Associate Professor of Political Science and Sociology, Johns Hopkins University
- Charles Epp | University Distinguished Professor, School of Public Affairs and Administration, University of Kansas
- Jack Glaser | Professor, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California Berkeley
- Jeff Fagan | Isidor and Seville Sulzbacher Professor of Law, Columbia Law School
- Joseph Richardson | Joel and Kim Feller Endowed Professor of African-American Studies and Anthropology, University of Maryland College Park

Weaver set up the panel discussion noting that the harmful effects of police stops are well documented in qualitative work. “This story is not new,” she said. Panelists shared findings from their own research across other jurisdictions, much of which was consistent with the experiences of harm described by participants during Workshops One and Two. Weaver and Fagan noted legal estrangement, cynicism, inequalities in citizenship, as well as detriments to mental health and educational attainment as some of the harms of stops. Weaver added that we have little understanding of how white youth respond to stops, but that research suggests that if they are diverted from a ticket or arrest, “what they learn is the flip side of legal estrangement. They learn benevolence.” Epp noted that more than half of the Black males in a study he led said they avoid driving in some areas out of fear of being harassed during an investigatory stop. Epp added that stops and increasing stops are often the only solution that residents can think of in response to crime and the Department of Justice and National Highway Transportation Safety Commission tell policy departments and policy makers that stops help fight crime.

Richardson urged participants to acknowledge the harms that aren't fully reflected in the data. He emphasized that the physical injury officers inflict each year goes largely unreported by victims and hospitals.

Weaver concluded the panel by asking panelists to name one policy innovation they'd like to see in the near term. Recommendations included a ban on Terry stops, which grant police officers a wide degree of discretion in who they stop and search; the training of physicians and other medical staff to code police-inflicted injuries that they treat, so these injuries do not go undocumented; and the creation of local councils of residents who can receive reports of problem areas of the community.

Large Group Discussion

The session closed with participants discussing how stops could be made safer and more effective. Ideas included:

- having local governments address the gaps in social services that police are often left to fill (e.g., child custody or mental health issues);
- making more police accountability data public;
- engaging the community in redefining the role of stops in overall public safety;
- creating incentives for officers that do not rely on stops (e.g., community outreach and public health goals);
- focusing stops to known offenders (e.g., members of a gang with a shooting history);
- moving policing from a first to last resort in response to a public safety need; and
- keeping the goals of abolitionism on the table.

Workshop Five: What Have We Overlooked?

In the final workshop on research, Anita Ravishankar from DC MPD and The Lab @ DC moderated a panel on new policing practices and areas for further investigation. Then, Hakeem Jefferson of Stanford University led a discussion of possible solutions for questions posed in the earlier workshop sessions.

What Don't We Know? What Have We Overlooked? Panel-Led Discussion

- Anita Ravishankar | Research Scientist, DC MPD | Senior Fellow, The Lab @ DC
- David Abrams | Professor of Law, Business Economics, and Public Policy, Carey Law School, University of Pennsylvania
- Christian Davenport | Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Michigan | Faculty Associate and Research Professor, Center for Political Studies, Peach Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
- Tracey Meares | Walton Hale Hamilton Professor and Founding Director of the Justice Collaboratory, Yale Law School
- Joseph Richardson | Joel and Kim Feller Endowed Professor of African-American Studies and Anthropology, University of Maryland College Park
- David Rudovsky | Senior Fellow, Penn Law, University of Pennsylvania

The panel began with Davenport and Meares advocating that participants adopt a new perspective of policing. We've been primed to look at police-civilian interactions in the context of war, Davenport explained. "If we didn't," he asked, "what would we define as excessive stops or force?" Similarly, Meares shared that in decades past, the government urged police not to worry about reducing crime, but to respond to justice claims when people had been harmed. That's certainly not what we believe now or how police operate, she said. With that in mind, she urged participants to think about how to address stops by first asking broader questions like, "what do police do on a day-to-day basis [besides stops]," and "how do civilians feel about their interactions with armed first responders?" Meares concluded, "Evidence is a set of facts that answer a question. And we need to decide what the question is."

Abrams and Rudovsky then posed a series of questions on measurement and next steps. Abrams asked, "How many stops a year is too many? How do we collect data across all US police departments? How do we change cultures and departments that we know have issues of over-policing and discriminatory application of policies?" Rudovsky followed up with the question of what comes once a police department accepts that racial disparities are occurring at the hands of their officers. "How do they leverage this information to change outcomes?"

Richardson focused his recommendations for new policing practices on understanding the scope of police-inflicted injuries. Since police departments are not required to report to the Department of Justice the number of people non-fatally shot by police, Richardson advocated that healthcare workers be mandated to report police abuse in the same way they are mandated to report child abuse and elder abuse.

Ravishankar closed the panel by asking how individual security and liberty can be balanced when it comes to stops. Meares urged that participants avoid this dichotomy. Instead of asking communities, "How do you want to be policed?" we should be asking them, "What do you want your community to

look like?”. Davenport agreed, saying, “If crime is derivative of poverty, then we’re pointing at the wrong source when we point to police.” Abrams noted that—at least in the short term—police still play a large role in our lives, so we have to address both the policing and non-police issues simultaneously.

How Can We Answer These Questions? Panel-Led Discussion

- Hakeem Jefferson | Assistant Professor, Political Science, Stanford University
- Nick Camp | Assistant Professor of Organizational Studies, University of Michigan
- Christian Davenport | Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Michigan | Faculty Associate and Research Professor, Center for Political Studies, Peach Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
- Jessica Gillooly | Senior Policing Fellow, Policing Project, NYU School of Law
- Jack Glaser | Professor, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California Berkeley
- Andrea Headley | Assistant Professor, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University

Jefferson led the group in proposing potential research-based solutions to harmful police stops. The panel proposed four ideas.

First, Camp suggested analyzing police-civilian interactions with body-worn camera footage from non-incidents as a teaching tool. Using machine learning, Camp thought that the vast data set of footage could be leveraged to look at whether officers, at a macro level, respect residents.

Second, Gillooly suggested looking more closely at calls for service to break down the “chain of bias” Figueroa mentioned in Workshop One. She suggested reviewing what 911 call centers define as “suspicious” and worthy of a dispatch and then instructing call takers to probe callers about what they’re seeing to gather more information. Gillooly said she’d also like to see alternatives to calling 911.

Headley raised the idea of leveraging the same technology police departments use to surveil civilians—drones, CCTV, red light cameras, etc.—to further reduce police discretion. The panel, however, recognized that automated policing introduces other aspects of bias of which we need to be aware (e.g., bias in algorithms).

Finally, Davenport and Glaser urged participants to address non-policing issues, particularly poverty. “To gut crime, we have to address inequality. We’re caught up in this endless cycle of talking about safety instead of thriving,” said Davenport. Glaser agreed, “When we focus on crime reduction, we reduce this to a game of whack-a mole when we want to be playing a game of chess.”

Workshop Six: Where Are the Opportunities for Change?

Roger Mitchell, then DC Deputy Mayor for Public Safety & Justice and Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, opened Workshop Six by sharing his long-term vision for a public health and community-centered approach to public safety. While law enforcement plays an important role in this vision, Mitchell emphasized the need to engage other entities preventively. To him this means working with those most at-risk in communities through government violence interruption, behavioral health, family success programs, and faith- and community-based groups.

Mitchell also acknowledged the complexities of police stops—that they may have a valuable role in crime prevention (e.g., recovering illegal firearms) and crime solving (e.g., as an investigative tool)—but must be done in a manner that does not harm communities. Mitchell posited several opportunities for change, including expansion of local recruitment of law enforcement; reforms to police training and culture; continuing education for police officers; and re-evaluating consent searches.

Where Are the Opportunities for Change? Panel-Led Discussion

- Lynda Garcia | Policing Campaign Director, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
- Ashley Carter | Senior Staff Attorney, Advancement Project
- Darius Charney | Senior Staff Attorney, Center for Constitutional Rights
- Puneet Cheema | Manager, Justice in Public Safety Project, NAACP Legal Defense Fund
- Mike Davis | Vice President of Campus Safety and Chief of Police, Northeastern University
- Setarah Yelle | Strategy and Innovation Officer, DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE)

Garcia led the first panel on where to focus efforts to reduce harmful stops. The group started off by addressing the question, “How did we get to our public understanding of policing?” Davis shared that, “For decades police departments have been over-promising what they can accomplish on their own,” and in doing so, reinforcing the norm of calling 911 for anything suspicious. Cheema noted that policing has become our sole response to violence, but those responses often do not address a significant portion of the violence communities experience, such as sexual assault and domestic violence.

The group then discussed how we can shift public understanding of policing towards a new vision of public safety. Carter stressed the need for political education that’s divorced from state involvement. She emphasized, “[W]hen those interested in protecting the system teach others about those systems, a lot gets left out, manipulated, [or] reshaped to serve existing structures.” Cheema added that part of education is giving communities a suite of options for public safety. “Often, we present the option of a police response or nothing. We have to present people with alternatives to policing,” she said. Charney highlighted the need to rethink our mode of community engagement—rather than the typical big public forums, we need a series of small group meetings led by trusted nonprofit partners. Davis pointed out Police Culture needs to be reformed, but that police officers are human beings and reforms to police accountability would benefit from treating officers “holistic[ly].” Lastly, Yelle encouraged participants to expand their view of public safety to one of public health. She outlined how DC’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE) adopts this approach through 1) relentless pursuit to engage at-risk individuals rather than waiting for them to walk through the door; 2) identifying violence interrupters—individuals already rooted in communities affected by violence—and giving them resources to lead community members in prevention and response; and 3) providing scaffolded programming with no

wrong door to engage (e.g. transitional employment, street outreach, cognitive behavioral therapy, and substance abuse support).

The panel concluded with Charney emphasizing that, even if reforms like those discussed by these co-panelists are implemented, there will likely always be “bad stops” due to the very difficult nature of policing. He and others thus stressed the continuing need for officer accountability—including at the frontline supervisor level—to minimize “bad stops.”

How Do These Opportunities Fit the DC Context? How Will We Know What “Worked”? Panel-Led Discussion

- Christy Lopez | Professor from Practice, Georgetown Law
- Delonte Gholston | Senior Pastor, PeaceWalksDC & Peace Fellowship Church | DC Police Reform Commission
- Ben Haiman | Executive Director for the Professional Development Bureau, Metropolitan Police Department
- Michael Perloff | Attorney, ACLU of the District of Columbia
- Patrice Sulton | Founder and Executive Director, DC Justice Lab; DC Police Reform Commission
- Michael Tobin | Executive Director, DC Office of Police Complaints

Lopez led the second panel on adopting solutions for DC and measuring public safety success. The panel discussed how to make alternatives to policing work—or work better. Gholston urged participants to expand their vision of public safety and think critically about who fills public safety roles. He stressed that officers are ill-equipped and ill-experienced to serve as first responders to mental health crises. Instead, he proposed training residents to be first responders or “care chaplains” and launching mobile crisis response units. “We have parking lots full of squad cars. We should also have a parking lot full of mobile crisis units,” Gholston stated.

The conversation then turned to which types of stops are prone to bad outcomes and how those stops could be less frequent and coercive. Tobin shared that the two types of stops most likely to lead to misconduct complaints are: (1) minor traffic violations (like rolling through a stop sign) that turn into probable cause searches and (2) field contacts that lead to a consent search. These field contacts, he shared, can lead to bad feelings, police mistrust, and use of force. Sulton felt that police departments have demonstrated that they cannot determine whether they should discontinue certain tactics, like consent searches, stops for minor traffic infractions, and jump-outs squads, so legislators need to explicitly limit the actions officers can take. Haiman emphasized that MPD officers react and respond to the laws on the books. Perloff suggested unarmed civilians from other government agencies should make stops. “It’s not that radical,” he remarked, citing that responses from non-law enforcement already happen in other contexts, like DC Health performing restaurant sanitation checks and DC Office of For Hire Vehicles regulating taxi and limousine services.

Breakout Group Discussions: Reimagining Stops at the Individual, Department, and City Levels.

In breakout groups, participants expanded on and prioritized the potential policy changes they developed earlier for presentation at the following workshop. Those proposals are described in the next section.

Workshop Seven: Where Do We Go From Here?

At the final day of the workshop series, participants presented a series of research and policy recommendations to public safety leaders in District government, including Peter Newsham, DC MPD; Del McFadden, ONSE; and Karima Holmes, OUC.

What Are Key Open Research Questions? How Can We Leverage New Data/Methods? Panel-Led Discussion

- Andrea Headley | Assistant Professor, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University
- Jack Glaser | Professor, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California Berkeley

Headley and Glaser summarized key research findings on the effects of stops and emphasized that, as participants pursue further research in this space, they must value interdisciplinary approaches and different forms of knowledge—qualitative, quantitative, and data sources in other policy areas like housing and education. We need to talk, listen, and observe people to “nest that data within the real workings of how things are,” Glaser stressed.

Policy Recommendations from Breakout Group Discussions

Representatives from each of the participant breakout groups then shared their groups’ policy recommendations for reimagining police stops at the individual, departmental, and city level. Their recommendations included:

We want our city leaders to acknowledge the harm stops have had on our communities and to address the pervasive issues of inequality in our city. This means recognizing that public safety is a public health issue, and we must also fund non-policing solutions that address poverty, housing insecurity, mental health challenges, sex work, etc. It also requires looking more critically at the effects of gentrification.

We need to formalize and invest in community engagement as a core activity versus a nice to have. This means formalizing regular check-ins between police precincts and neighborhood leaders and ensuring warm handoffs when staff changes occur. It also means tethering officer performance metrics to proactive, positive engagement with the community they serve.

We need to rethink accountability, not just at the officer and departmental level, but at the city level. The District should set citywide performance metrics on public safety that comprehensively focus on community vitality versus the typical crime reduction metrics. DC should make robust data available to the public, not just in government produced reports, but in popular news publications; and audits of police data and performance should be regular and independent.

We need to make changes to department policies on stops. We need to narrow the scope of acceptable stops, end the current version of jump outs, and require officers to communicate the reason for a stop when a stop is made.

We need responsive alternatives to 911 and tools to break the chain of bias that can infiltrate

calls for service. The District should train 911 call takers in trauma-informed care and give them the ability to route calls to non-police responders for needs related to homelessness, mental illness, and substance abuse. The District should ensure that these alternatives are just as responsive as the police (24/7).

We need to continue to think creatively about how we recruit, train, and hold officers accountable. This might mean using a psychological screening to not only weed out particularly ill-suited candidates, but also to prioritize particularly well-suited candidates for hire. The District could provide signing bonuses for recruits who live in priority DC neighborhoods or have graduated from DC schools. Community members and social service workers could be brought into the officer training process and performance metrics could shift from the quantity of stops to the number of community engagements.

Each District government leader responded to the recommendations with a series of questions for participants to further explore.

Newsham started by noting that police have not fully appreciated the impact that stops have on the communities they serve, particularly when those stops are biased or procedurally unjust. He emphasized the critical importance of publicly acknowledging these harms.

He then turned to the topic of neighborhood nuisances, like excessive noise, which he stressed can have a profound impact on residents. “How do we deal with nuisance calls proactively? What non-police responders could we utilize?” he asked.

Holmes focused her comments on the 911 Call Center and asked how we can balance the desire for more complete information for dispatchers and responding officers with the need to respond quickly. She also asked participants to take a step back and think about the preventive measures that can be taken so the “wrong” calls for service don’t come to 911 in the first place.

Newsham and McFadden probed the topic of recruitment and retention, asking participants how we can incentivize DC residents to become and remain officers so we can move towards more true community policing. They also underscored the importance of thinking about officer wellness and supporting investments in community policing through programs that recruit officers from the community, as well as those that encourage officers to live within the communities they serve.

The series ended with a commitment by workshop hosts to document these recommendations in a white paper—this document—as well as assemble [Sample Learning Agendas](#) and a set of [Policy Considerations](#) on police stops.

Appendix A: Workshop Agenda

Appendix B: Virtual “Whiteboards” from Breakout Group Discussions

Note: While each of the five breakout groups began with the same prompts, facilitators and participants adapted the materials to best suit their group’s needs.