

1. Racial Profiling in Washington, D.C.

In January 2002, PCB issued a report and recommendations regarding the identification and prevention of racial profiling by police officers in the District of Columbia. Specifically, PCB recommended five policy changes that MPD should implement to identify and prevent racial profiling: (1) collect data on traffic stops; (2) implement a simple and inexpensive paper-based system of data collection; (3) ensure the statistical reliability of the data by including experts on data collection and analysis, chosen by community groups, civil liberties organizations, OPC, and MPD; (4) implement officer education and training on laws against racially biased policing; and (5) adopt a racial profiling policy and data collection system by June 1, 2002.

Following PCB's report and recommendations, MPD undertook its Biased Policing Project, which was designed to address issues regarding racial profiling and other forms of police bias in the District. As part of the project, and to serve in an advisory capacity, MPD formed a Community-Police Task Force, which OPC has participated in since it was created. After several years of work and some significant delays by the Department, the research organization hired by MPD to study biased policing issues, the Police Foundation, completed its report regarding the District and also recommended, among other things, that MPD implement a stop data collection program to detect any racial profiling and other forms of police bias. Through its work on the task force, and in direct advocacy to the Mayor, the Council, and Chief Ramsey, OPC strongly encouraged MPD to follow the recommendation regarding the collection of stop data. MPD announced in December 2004 that it would go forward with the stop data collection program.

On July 29, 2005, MPD convened a meeting of the task force to introduce Dr. John Lamberth, the expert retained by MPD to collect and analyze stop data. Dr. Lamberth explained that his study will assess stops of motorists and pedestrians made by the police, and that these stops will be measured against certain "benchmark data." This term refers to the control data against which stop data can be compared to determine if any racial or ethnic group is being stopped at a disproportionate rate. Dr. Lamberth explained that he would employ "observation surveys" to measure the traffic for motorists and pedestrians, broken down by race and ethnicity. OPC and other members of the task force objected when MPD indicated that the study would not include an analysis of post-stop data, such as whether citizens who were stopped were then searched or gave their consent to being searched. OPC set forth its concerns over this issue in a letter to Chief Ramsey dated August 9, 2005. Subsequently, MPD announced the inclusion of post-stop data and analysis in Dr. Lamberth's study.

The data collection and analysis project is expected to be completed by August 31, 2006, when the U.S. Department of Justice grant funding the study expires. OPC will continue to monitor closely the work performed by MPD and Dr. Lamberth on the project.