

Dear Mayor Todd Gloria and San Diego City Council,

As health professionals, we are not only healers but are also advocates for our patients. Because of our duty to our patients and their wellbeing, we write to you to express our concern about a public health issue afflicting San Diegans: biased policing.

In 2018, the American Public Health Association (APHA), which hosts the largest public health conference in the world, convened in San Diego where they adopted a statement that identifies law enforcement violence as a public health issue. Their statement states in part:

“Inappropriate stops by law enforcement are one form of psychological violence with serious implications for public health. Even in the absence of physical violence, several studies have shown that stops perceived as unfair, discriminatory, or intrusive are associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder”.ⁱ

The statement cited several studies that looked at the health effects of biased policing. One study revealed that neighborhood-level frisks and use of force were linked to elevated levels of psychological distress among men living in these neighborhoods.ⁱⁱ The statement also references two large studies that found Black individuals were more likely than white individuals to report stress as a result of encounters with police—a significant finding given evidence of stress due to perceived racial discrimination is associated with risk factors for chronic disease and early mortality.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although this statement looked at the issue from a national context, it is appropriate that the statement was adopted in San Diego because it is relevant to our city. In San Diego we have the benefit of several studies at our disposal that have looked at San Diego Police Department (SDPD) data and confirmed that racial disparate policing practices are an issue in San Diego. Collectively, the studies found that:

- In 85% of SDPD beats, Black people are stopped at higher rates than white people.^{iv}
- In 2018-2019, Pacific Islanders were stopped by San Diego police at 126% high rate per population than white people.^v
- In 2018-2019, SDPD was 60% more likely to conduct consent searches on Latinos and 23% more likely to conduct consent searches on Black people than white people. Both groups were less likely to be found with contraband during these searches.^{vi}
- SDPD was 81% more likely to search people perceived to have mental disabilities during a stop and more than two times as likely to use force against them as compared to people with no perceived disability.^{vii}
- SDPD was 22% more likely to search and 54% more like to arrest without a warrant people who were perceived as LGBTQ compared people who were perceived non-LGBTQ.^{viii}
- In 2014 and 2015, SDPD searched Black and Latino drivers nearly two times as often as white drivers.^{ix}

- In July 2021, the Center for Policing Equity released a report analyzing SDPD's data and found that people from Black, Latino and Asian communities were subjected to force more often than white people. Black people were subjected to force 5 times as often as white people, Latino people were subjected to force 1.2 times as often as white people, and Asian people were subjected to force .2 times as often as white people.^x

Given the health impacts of overpolicing and identity profiling on community members, we write to you in support of PrOTECT (Preventing Overpolicing Through Equitable Community Treatment), a city ordinance that requires officers to have probable cause in order to stop and search someone. To meaningfully address biased policing, we need to do more than diversity training and recruiting. We need to eliminate police practices that facilitate disproportionate violence against specific populations. PrOTECT would be a meaningful step towards this aim.

We sign this letter in support of PrOTECT and hope you will stand with us.

Sincerely,

[signatories]

ⁱ *Addressing Law Enforcement Violence as a Public Health Issue*, American Public Health Association, <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2019/01/29/law-enforcement-violence> (Nov. 13, 2018).

ⁱⁱ A. Sewell, K. Jefferson, H. Lee, *Living under surveillance: gender, psychological distress, and stop-question-and-frisk policing in New York City*, Soc Sci Med. (2016).

ⁱⁱⁱ A. Geller, J. Fagan, T. Tyler, B. Link, *Aggressive policing and the mental health of young urban men*, Am J Public Health, (2014).

Stress on the streets (SOS): race, policing, health, and increasing trust not trauma.

<http://www.trustnottrauma.org/downloads>.

^{iv} Samuel Sinyangwe, *Evaluating Policing in San Diego*, Campaign Zero, <https://policescorecard.org/san-diego/police-scorecard-san-diego-report.pdf>, (2021).

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Joshua Chanin, Megan Welsh, Dana Nurge, Stuart Henry, *Traffic enforcement in San Diego, CA*, San Diego State University, <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/sdpdvehiclestopsfinal.pdf>, (November 2016).

^x *Center for Policing Equity National Justice Database Digital Report*, Center for Policing Equity, <https://www.sandiego.gov/police/about/police-equity-report>, (June 2021).