

JUNETEENTH SOCIAL JUSTICE FORUM

CITIZEN QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. We know black men are treated poorly by police, but so are women and many times they are treated worse. Why?

There is no statistical data gathered to support this claim. Law enforcement agencies and the leadership within those agencies have an expectation that members of their departments will remain professional and courteous during their interactions with the public. If there are accusations that a police officer is not treating members of the public appropriately, it is suggested this be brought to the attention of the appropriate leadership within the respective agency so the accusation can be appropriately investigated and addressed if need be. Submitted by the Michigan Department of State Police

2. What trainings are police officers taking to educate them on racial targeting and harassment?

Police officers have a number of training options available in this area. Implicit bias training is a course many departments are requiring their members to attend along with a requirement for a certain number of continuing education credits. A few examples of topics that may be included for this are de-escalation training, autism awareness, interviewing techniques, and leadership development and communication skills. MCOLES (Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards) mandates a number of trainings within academy curriculum that all police officers in Michigan are required to take. These include topics such as Ethics in Policing, Cultural Awareness and Diversity, Managing Mental Health Crisis and Patrol Response, and Interpersonal Skills. Submitted by the Michigan Department of State Police

3. Why do you think we see lethal force being used seemingly as first choice and why does this disproportionately affect individuals of color?

There are a lot of factors to consider when taking this question as presented. To say lethal force is being used as first choice is not supported with any facts and leads to a false narrative if not validated.

It is true, that per capita more black Americans are killed by police than white Americans. Black Americans accounted for 24% of all police killings in 2020 but account for only 14% of the population. There are many factors to consider when looking at these numbers. Many police agencies are looking for ways to improve training, and a review of hiring processes along with required non bias training programs.

To address the question of “first choice”, over 61 million residents have at least one contact with police each year with the vast majority resulting in no use of force at all. In 2020, the last full year of accurate statistics 1,021 people were shot and killed by police. This includes all races, all gender, armed or un-armed or are in the commission of a crime. Statistically speaking, you are more likely to be struck by lightning than killed by a cop, this includes people of color.

In Michigan, during this same time, a total of 171 people were shot and killed by police. Each person in Michigan that was shot and killed in 2020 were armed at the time, 7 out of the 17 were reported as black¹. This is not to say that any killing of a citizen is acceptable when it could be avoided, but it is important to realize that news outlets are not always factual. Law enforcement is in a battle of perception versus reality that we are decisively losing. When the entire country sees video of police shootings and told there are race issues that play a part, this lends to the perception that police are shooting young black men and women when the facts do not support this notion.

In conclusion, understanding facts is critical when it comes to perception of our citizens being killed by police. Submitted by the Michigan Department of State Police

¹ “Fatal Force: Police Shootings Database.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 22 Jan. 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/.

¹ Author(s) Erika Harrell Ph.D. “Contacts between Police and the PUBLIC, 2018 - Statistical Tables.” *Office of Justice Programs*, www.ojp.gov/library/publications/contacts-between-police-and-public-2018-statistical-tables

4. What supplemental services or police alternatives are being considered to handle cases like domestic incidents, mental health crisis, and drug overdoses?

With domestic situations, there is a high priority to the safety of victims and that police response is dictated by policy as well as law. Laws in place are in such a way that any evidence of assault requires LE to make an arrest. There is no ambiguity when it comes to cops enforcing the law in this situation. There are numerous community programs in place that are designed to assist victims of domestic violence and usually falls to these organizations outside of LE due to HIPPA law and privacy concerns. There is also the concern for the safety of responders simply due to the high percentage of LE assaults during times of domestic disturbances.

In the case of a drug overdose, there has been a change in direction for LE in recent years. In the case of an overdose, LE is contacted for the health of the subject as a first responder, there is no criminal arrest made and no criminal charges are requested. This does not extend to any subject who sells or provides a controlled substance, only to those that are in a medical crisis. This is in hopes that 911 is called to help those in need without the fear of being arrested for possession.

Mental health crisis is a whole different story and LE does not have a good answer at this point because of so many different opinions on

approach to the subject. Currently, if a call comes in and includes safety as a concern then LE is dispatched. There are some who think that a mental health professional should respond in place of LE, others believe that public safety or safety of the person involved should be the priority and LE should be dispatched. There is no single best answer for this because every situation is different, the core issue could be mental health or substance abuse. Currently, there are agencies that have addressed autism by providing additional training and sensory calming items in patrol vehicles. There is still more work and training to do.

Local organizations are providing needed support in these areas. Lifeways, Home of New Vision are just a couple that service our area. Jackson is very fortunate to have the amount of community support provided by social services that it does have, it is imperative that the community knows what services are available to them. Submitted by Michigan Department of State Police

5. What is the Prosecutor's Office doing to address white supremacy groups in Jackson County?

The Prosecuting Attorney does not investigate crimes but police agencies do investigate crimes whether by an individual or by a group such as a white supremacy group. Once the investigation is completed, it is submitted to the Prosecuting Attorney's Office for review to determine if there is enough evidence to charge and prove a crime beyond a reasonable doubt. If there is sufficient evidence to meet the burden of proof, the case is authorized and then, prosecuted. Submitted by Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney

6. Sherriff Schuette spoke about conversations to help white police officers understand “culture”. What formal steps are being taking to ensure all officers receive training and deeper understanding of the underlying issues around systemic racism?

The meaning behind Sheriff Schuette’s statement was to address another benefit to diversity in police rank and file; often a point of view that is not considered. The classroom is a static environment that offers information without application. The workplace, on the other hand, provides an opportunity to talk about issues as they arise. This is important because there is often mutual understanding that goes along with the shared experience of enforcing the law. As a result, barriers are broken and understanding is enhanced. Sheriff Schuette was explaining how this experience benefited him and why he believes it is crucial to the future of our community.

Currently, racism is addressed during training sessions which is delivered to the officer/deputy/trooper either through in-service training or core training. In-service training is handled through either the law enforcement consortium (area agencies that work together to provide training to each other), or through instructors that are in house. In these trainings, the officer/deputy/trooper receives a core block of instruction that deals with current topics that have surfaced, coupled with learned core areas.

Core training refers to training that is a part of the development of the officer/deputy/trooper. This is more base information that provides general insights and knowledge to enhance overall understanding.

Trainings include Cultural Diversity, Cultural Connections, and Cultural Bias in Law Enforcement. Submitted by Jackson County Sheriff’s Office

7. The FBI has recognized white supremacy groups pose a grave threat to our citizens and national security. What do you think our local, state, and federal governments should do to address white supremacists from getting and keeping jobs in law enforcement?

This seems like a simple problem that requires a simple solution; fire people who are a part of this group, and put strict hiring guidelines in place to weed out applicants who are also part of the group. But unfortunately it is not that simple, as all three governmental entities run into complex legal issues surrounding freedoms granted by the Constitution.

Locally, we can address these issues in a more expeditious manner. For instance, applicants are required to complete a thorough background investigation before being hired. Through this process we require access to social media, and we speak with friends, neighbors, associates, high school and college associates, teachers and college professors, just to name a few. Through this process, specific questions regarding affiliations with groups involved in these activities are asked and answered. If there is a nexus between the applicant and these groups, or any criminal organization, then the applicant fails the background and is not hired.

For current Law Enforcement Officers (LEO's), we have established strict guidelines that require adherence in order to maintain employment; these guidelines are often referred to as General Orders, or in some cases Policies and Procedures. For instance, an LEO would be subject to discipline up to termination, depending upon the circumstances of the transgression, for using hate speech, associating with known criminals, or posting racially laced comments on social media. In cases of termination, notification is made to the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards (MCOLES), the state licensing agency for police officers, to remove eligibility. Submitted by Jackson County Sheriff's Office

8. Are police unions the reason for the lack of trust surrounding misconduct of officers, cover ups, and the “Blue Wall of Silence”?

No, Police Unions are not the sole reason for police mistrust. People mistrust bad behavior of bad policing. When bad policing is committed people want actionable consequences for the individuals involved with the bad policing. When it doesn't happen there is plenty of resentment and blame. But understand there has been a lot of bad policing held accountable through federal indictments, convictions, incarcerations, and federal probes into policing agencies that have led to consent decrees to correct the behaviors of the policing agency.

Unions provide protections for the employees through contracts and collective bargaining. However it does not exempt officers from prosecution of crimes committed or bad policing. Submitted by Jackson County Sheriff's Office

9. We have seen time and time again police officers dealing with heavily armed and dangerous white people without the use of force, in a lot of cases they are treated with respect and dignity. Can you speak to why you believe policy allows for such disparity between treatments of people of color versus white people?

I have been in policing for 30 years and I have yet to see a policing policy with color/culture/ethnicity tied to it concerning the treatment of citizens. Policy however states that all citizens are treated with respect and dignity. The perspective from the media has led people to believe that heavily armed assailants are treated differently if they are white than blacks.

The few incidents that made national news are few and far between. If you look at our local statistics in Jackson it clearly shows that most violent crime occurs in the black neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods, and I'll be the first to tell you that both sides of the fence are treated equally when arrested and jailed. There is no special treatments based on race.

Local law enforcement train hard on use of force “shoot, don’t shoot scenarios” the training has paid dividends as police involved shootings are almost nil, yet there have been plenty of arrests of heavily armed citizens both black and white without incident. Submitted by Jackson County Sheriff’s Office

10. Why is there over policing in poverty-stricken neighborhoods instead of upper middle class neighborhoods? The same drugs, guns, violence, etc. are in those neighborhoods. There are so many upper middle class drug dealers, but they are not targeted, why? Is it due to money?

There is not one simple answer to this question. There is a correlation between poverty and criminal activity. When looking at poverty, if someone is struggling and merely trying to survive with little to no means, many times the answer to surviving and providing includes stealing, robbing or perhaps selling drugs to maintain some form of stability.

Poverty can go hand in hand with stress and trauma. Many people from all walks of life may turn to drugs/alcohol to escape their reality. Once a habit is formed, it becomes another mouth to feed so to speak which adds to the above. This form of self-medicating can also lead to violence both in the home (domestically) as well as street violence (robbery).

If the correlation between poverty and criminal activity is accurate, it can be concluded that poverty stricken neighborhoods will also utilize more police resources to handle reporting of crimes, domestic violence, and checking the welfare of children who are caught in the middle. This is often a band aid approach that does not tackle the root issues driving the behaviors. It may appear to those in the neighborhood to be over policing, when in fact statistics show these areas to be higher crime areas.

Mid to upper class drug dealers are in fact targeted. Generally they have more means to disguise their drug dealing which may take more of an investigative effort. These are not dealers doing hand to hand deals in the street but are more sophisticated. It could be argued that in poverty stricken neighborhoods, drug dealing to an extent is tolerated which does not prompt community members to call the police. The same behavior in middle to upper class neighborhoods would most likely prompt a call to the police as it is not the norm and would not be tolerated by most in the neighborhood. Submitted by Jackson Police Department

11. Has there been training for officers to assist in DEI based on safe handling of people who are confronted by police or arrested? If so, how do we motivate other towns/communities?

The Jackson Police Department has a policy titled Bias-Based Policing. This policy outlines the Department's commitment to policing in fair and objective manner. Officers shall provide law enforcement services and enforce the law equally, fairly, objectively and with discrimination toward any individual or group.

Some noteworthy training officers have gone through includes Bridges Out Of Poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Both of these trainings bring about new perspectives and begin to create a deeper understanding of where people may be coming from. In addition, JPD has two officers trained as trainers in a de-escalation model that all officers have now gone through.

Lastly, one of the most powerful things a law enforcement agency can do is build a caring culture and one that values the treatment of all persons with dignity and respect. Leading by example in this area is how we motivate others to do the same. Submitted by Jackson Police Department

12. Someone stated “it is difficult to shoot someone you know such as family,” but what about people you don’t know? How many black families do you know?

I cannot personally speak to how difficult it is to shoot someone regardless of family or not because I have never had to shoot at anyone. Truth told, statistically the overwhelming majority of law enforcement officers never have to discharge their weapon in the line of duty at another human being. I often think this fact is overlooked and/or misconstrued by some of the general public.

With the above said, I certainly think the concept of it being it more difficult to shoot someone you know makes logical sense. God forbid any law enforcement officer is put in a situation to have to take someone’s life let alone possibly having to the life of someone you know or even potentially love. Submitted by Jackson Police Department