

Providence Traffic Stop Statistics Compliance Final Report

Prepared by

Jack McDevitt
Amy Farrell
Mary Yee

Northeastern University
Institute on Race and Justice

October 31, 2003

Providence Traffic Stop Statistics Final Report on Compliance

Prepared by
The Institute on Race and Justice at Northeastern University
October 31, 2003

In the fall of 2001 the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Rhode Island Attorney General brought suit against the City of Providence for non-compliance for the Traffic Stop Statistic Act. On November 30, 2001 the Providence Police Department (PPD) entered into an agreement with the Rhode Island Attorney General and the Rhode Island affiliate of the ACLU to allow outside monitoring of traffic stop data collection. In response to the court's order, Northeastern University instituted a procedure to audit the traffic stop statistics collected by the Providence Police Department. The order required the Providence Police Department to submit data on all 1) traffic stop calls to the Providence Police Department Computerized Dispatching System, including traffic stop statistics lithocode information for each call; 2) citations issued by the Providence Police Department and 3) videotapes of recorded traffic stops. While the Providence Police Department made efforts to ensure that all traffic stops were properly recorded, their data was not considered fully in compliance until the fall of 2002. As a result, the court ordered Providence to continue traffic stop data collection until July 31, 2003 in order to guarantee enough complete and reliable data for proper analysis. The goal of the court order was to insure that data was of sufficient quality to ensure that a proper analysis of racial disparities in traffic stops could be accomplished for Providence.

Collection of the traffic stop data in Providence has been completed through July 31, 2003. Over the course of the entire monitoring process, the Providence Police Department has made considerable progress in improving the accuracy and validity of their submitted data. From the data that has been analyzed, it is our opinion that the Providence Police Department is in substantial compliance with the data collection requirements of the Traffic Stop Statistics Act and previous court orders.

Summary of Results

Throughout the course of the audit Northeastern University has prepared monthly reports of the monitoring process. These reports are appended to the summary final report. The monthly reports assess the compliance of the department in completing traffic stop statistics cards by matching existing records of traffic stop activity from the department's CAD, citation and video data to the traffic stop statistics cards submitted by the PPD. This final report summarizes the match rates for all three measures across the entire auditing period from July 2002 through July 2003.

Throughout the course of this study the number of traffic stop cards submitted by the Providence Police Department has fluctuated. As illustrated in Table 1 the number of traffic stop statistic cards ranged from a low of 652 to a high of 1851. Although fluctuation of reported traffic stops has often been referenced as a source of concern regarding compliance, we believe that the fluctuation more accurately represents real changes in the enforcement patterns throughout the course of the study. As illustrated in the following analysis, in months where fewer traffic stop statistics cards were reported we also saw corresponding decreases in the number of CAD entries for traffic stop activity and citations issued. Therefore, evaluating the match rates between CAD, citation and video data with traffic stop cards is a more valid estimate of compliance than merely examining the total number of traffic stop cards reported by the PPD.

Match Rates on CAD Calls

As a result of on-going communications with Northeastern University, the PPD began in July 2002 to extract from their CAD database the calls that more accurately reflected traffic stops. This was a substantial improvement, since CAD data received by the University in prior months included tows and other miscellaneous traffic activity that did not result from traffic stops. During the audit period, the number of CAD calls ranged from 610 to 1749 calls per month. The match rate between CAD calls and traffic stop statistics cards ranged from a low of 85% to a high of 96%. From October 2002 through all the calculated rates of 2003 (rates were not calculated for March and April 2003 due to workload issues at Northeastern University with the completion of the statewide final report), the match rate of CAD calls to traffic stop statistic cards were consistently over 90%. We believe that this high level of matches between CAD

calls and traffic stop statistics cards is a strong indicator of the department's compliance with the state statute requiring data collection.

Match Rates on Citations Issued

Across the course of the audit the number of citations issued by the Providence Police Department ranged from 309 to 745. The match rates between the citations and the traffic stop statistics cards ranged from a low of 88% to a high of 96%. The match rate of citations to traffic stops statistic cards remained relatively consistent and high through the auditing period – a strong indicator of consistent compliance. Although there appear to be some recent reductions in the match rates between official records of citations and traffic stop statistics in May, June and July 2003 we suggest that the lower matches may be due to changes in the types of citation records that were provided to Northeastern University as opposed to reduced compliance by the Department. As the auditing concludes we are still working with the Providence Police Department to determine why match rates on citation might be decreasing while match rates on CAD calls remains consistently high.

Match Rates on In-Cruiser Videos

The number of in-cruiser video observations ranged from a low of 12 to a high of 139. It is clear that video observations are not recorded for all traffic stops. During the spring and summer of 2003 we believe that the video monitoring program at the PPD was extremely limited. Therefore, video matches were not conducted toward the end of the audit because we observed too few video observations of traffic stops upon which to reliably draw conclusions about compliance.

For those months where a sufficient number of traffic stops could be observed on video we made matches based on both time and date of the stop and secondary matches on the attributes of the stop which could be observed on tape (e.g. number of occupants, if a search was conducted, race or gender of driver). When time was the only attribute used for matching, the match rate ranged from a low of 83% to a high of 98%. When matching was based on the attributes of the stop, the match rate ranged from a low of 75% to a high of 89%. We have less confidence that the video observations are a valid source of data auditing. This is due to the low number of traffic stops

recorded on video in recent months compared to the level of traffic stop activity indicated by the other measurements. No comparisons for the video data were made in June 2003 or July 2003 because of the low number of video observations. The cause of decreased video observations may be important issue for the management of the Providence Police Department to look into, however, we believe that the PPD officers failure to initiate their video cameras did not affect the quality of the traffic stop statistics data. We conclude that the disparate use and quality of traffic stop videos renders this data less useful for our determination of compliance than was originally expected. Such problems, however do not alter our final conclusions that the PPD is in compliance based on both the CAD and citation match results described above.

Conclusion

The data submitted by the PPD reflects sufficient compliance with the requirements of the Traffic Stop Statistics Act, as well as previous court orders. Although fluctuations have occurred with the data during the months of the auditing period, the effect on the final analysis required by the Traffic Stop Statistics Act is minimal. To date, there is sufficient data upon which to draw conclusions about the prevalence of racial disparities in traffic stops in Providence.

SUMMARY TABLES

**Auditing Results of Providence Police Department Traffic Stop Data
July 2002 through July 2003**

Table 1: Distribution of Stop Cards, CAD Calls, Citation and Video Observations Across Auditing Period

Year	Month	Total # of Traffic Stop Statistic Cards		# of CAD Calls	# of Citations	# of Video Observations
		No citation	citation			
2002	July	759		651	312	-----
		397	362			
	August	1199		1103	502	117
		656	543			
	September	1368		1250	540	101
		739	629			
	October	1851		1749	745	86
		1064	787			
	November	1317		1248	534	105
		754	563			
	December	1062		1044	406	52
		687	375			
2003	January	1356		1304	439	139
		902	454			
	February	961		929	380	106
		580	381			
	March	1236		-----	-----	-----
		-----	-----			
	April	1134		-----	-----	-----
		-----	-----			
	May	800		784	325	43
		500	300			
	June	652		610	309	12
		367	285			
	July	1061		1028	576	26
		512	549			
TOTAL		14756		11700	5068	787

Table 2: Match Rates for Traffic Stop Cards Against CAD, Citation and Video Records

Year	Month	% of CAD Matches	% of Citation Matches	% of Video Matches by Time	% of Video Matches by Attributes
2002	July	85%	96%	83%	75%
	August	86%	92%	91%	76%
	September	88%	95%	91%	79%
	October	92%	93%	95%	89%
	November	95%	94%	96%	82%
	December	94%	88%	98%	80%
2003	January	96%	93%	97%	88%
	February	96%	94%	94%	76%
	March	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	April	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	May	94%	88%	91%	77%
	June	96%	90%	-----	-----
	July	93%	89%	-----	-----