



A Look at the US Capitol Police

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The U.S. Capitol Police (USCP) has the mission of ensuring public access to our elected officials while protecting members of Congress and the Capitol campus. The USCP is well resourced, with a [\\$450 million budget](#) — a little [larger than the budget for the police department serving Austin, Texas](#), which has a population of 950,000 people — and amounts to 10% of overall legislative branch spending. The department has [over 2,200 employees](#), which is slightly more personnel than the [Atlanta, Georgia, police department](#). USCP is one of the very few legislative branch agencies to have grown larger over the decades, with an approximate 3% budget increase annually.

What does the well-resourced Capitol Police department do with this significant capacity?

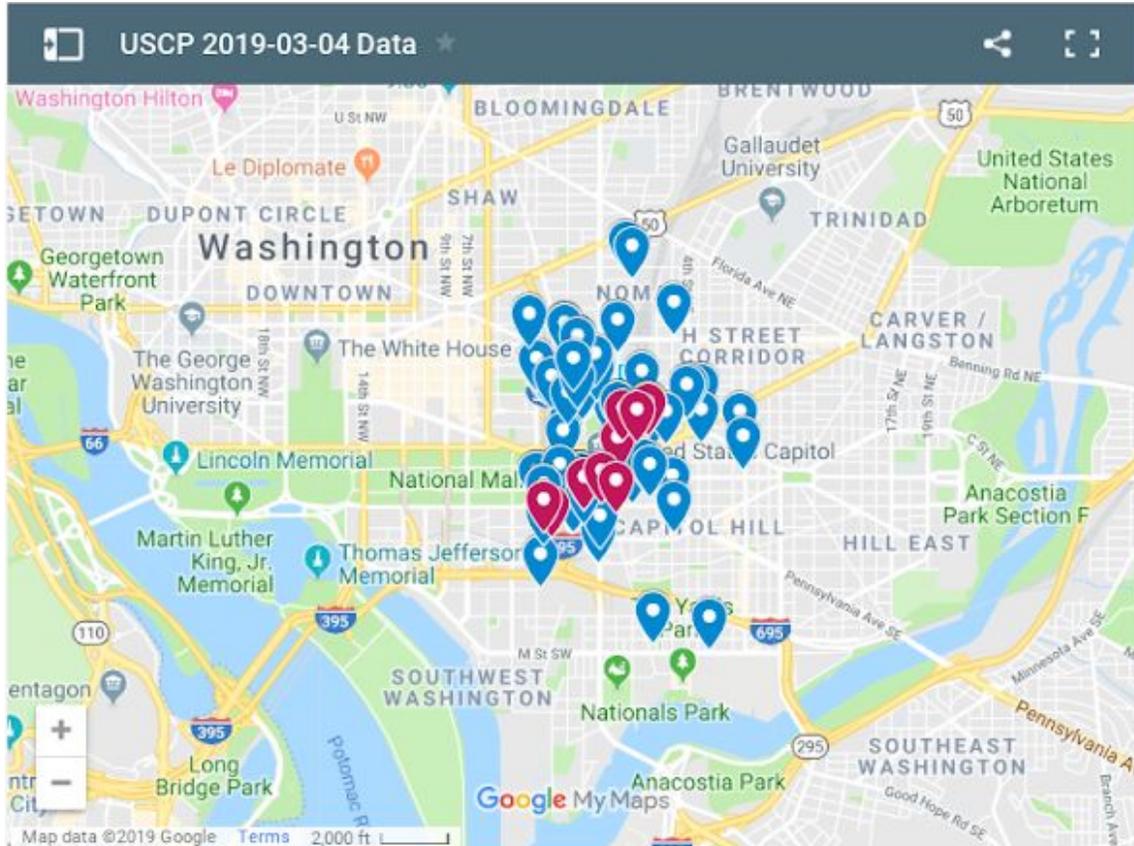
At the tail end of 2018 — [prompted](#) by multiple requests — the Capitol Police began publishing [weekly arrest summaries online](#) in PDF format. (We retyped that data into this [arrest spreadsheet](#).) We also requested arrest summaries that were made available to some journalists prior to 2019 as well as basic arrest demographic information in a data format, but those requests were not fulfilled.

We analyzed the information that is available — 86 incidents involving 160 individuals between December 19, 2018, and February 28, 2019.

We found the following trends:

- **Approximately half of the arrests, 82 in total**, concerned blocking a passageway, which suggests they related to the arrest of protesters.
- **Approximately one-third of the arrests, 53 in total**, concerned traffic violations.
- **Only half of the arrests, 85 in total**, were reported inside the House or Senate office buildings, of which the vast majority apparently were in connection with a protest. It is our understanding that arrests related to protests are often negotiated in advance with the USCP.
- **The USCP arrests statistics may not tell the whole story**, as we have reason to suspect that much information relating to USCP incidents (and possibly arrests) may not have been included.

A number of reported arrests took place blocks away from the capitol campus. We've published a map of all the arrests, the red pins mark House and Senate office buildings.



It's notable that four individuals were arrested after the USCP approached them for suspected marijuana use. DC [does not prohibit possession of marijuana](#) in some circumstances, although smoking it in public is illegal, as is possession under federal law.

The weekly arrest summaries include “incidents leading to arrest for criminal acts.” However, “not all USCP arrests result in publicly-available reports.” In other words, while we know the existence of incidents that lead to arrests, the USCP does not release the attendant reports for a subset of those arrests. According to USCP, reports accompanying arrests will be withheld “due to security concerns that may impact the safety of public officials under the Department’s protection, as well as to safeguard the means and methods by which we secure the Capitol Complex.” This seems both overbroad and vague.

There are also a number of incidents that do not lead to arrests, but little information is disclosed concerning them. A review of the weekly arrest summaries — we transformed USCP [PDFs](#) into this [arrest spreadsheet](#) — suggests there were 70 incidents in 2019 that led to arrests, and 545 other incidents that did not.

The USCP has now published online form [CP-1439](#) through which one can request the underlying reports, the response to which should not be expected before 7-10 days. One can also request the annual statistical report summary of Office of Professional Responsibility

Investigations, which concerns [allegations of misconduct](#). (We have requested those reports but have yet to receive them.)

Most police departments are subject to the state or local equivalent of the Freedom of Information Act, as are the overwhelming majority of federal law enforcement agencies. This allows members of the public to demand information and an impartial adjudication process regarding access. Similarly, many police departments publish arrest information as a matter of routine — [here is the Washington, D.C. arrest blotter](#) — but the USCP traditionally has not and is posting only some of the information other police departments make available.

However, the Capitol Police are located within the legislative branch, to which FOIA does not apply. (Some leg branch offices, but not USCP, routinely apply a [FOIA-like process](#) to requests for information.) The USCP is overseen by an [oversight board](#), composed of the USCP Chief of Police, the Sergeant at Arms of the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper of the U.S. Senate. Twice a year, the USCP may be called before legislative branch appropriators to justify their budget request, which will take place [this upcoming Tuesday](#). The House Administration Committee and Senate Rules Committee has oversight responsibility.

We reached out to the Capitol Police and this article is informed by their responses.

At the start, we noted the importance of the role the USCP plays in keeping the capitol campus open and safe for the public. Given recent news stories about Capitol Police officers [leaving their weapons in bathrooms](#) and [engaging in inappropriate conduct](#), as well as our recent article describing how the [USCP Inspector General does not publish any of its reports](#), we think it is important to shed light on the workings of the Congress's police force. We also would suggest that, in our experience, the vast majority of officers appear to conduct themselves cordially and professionally.

It is easy for USCP to escape significant public scrutiny because they play a significant role in keeping the Capitol secure and are accountable only to members of Congress, but the police force's significant size, ever-increasing budget, and lack of public accountability makes it vulnerable to missteps. A little sunshine can help prevent a host of ills.