

# NEW BEDFORD HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

An analysis of a survey on Policing prepared in August 2020 and distributed  
within the community.

Survey on Policing  
within the City of New  
Bedford prepared by  
the Human Relations  
Commission.

## Executive Summary:

In August of 2020, The Human Relations Commission prepared an online survey to be disseminated to the public. This survey was prepared at the same time the Mayor's Commission on Police Reform was created and holding meetings. The Executive Director of the Human Relations Commission as well as Commissioner Maria Rosario were members of the Mayor's Commission on Police Reform. One of the strategies of the Commission was to receive, listen and obtain experiences of citizens with NBPD. The HRC took the initiative of preparing a survey in English, Portuguese and Spanish to get an assessment of what the general public thought of the NBPD, as this falls within the mission and purpose of the Human Relations Commission. What was observed in the Police Commission Reform Meetings during spirited discussions was that citizens based on experience, race, age, demographics have differing views on law enforcement. Some believe race doesn't matter. Some believe you many have a few bad seeds but overall, our police officers do an incredible job, and some believe the system is not broken and should be left alone. One observance in the Police Reform Commission meetings was that many opinions and perspectives were being shared but there was no data offered to support one's opinions from either perspective.

The HRC whose office has done intake on Police Complaints as well as Discrimination Complaints, and worked with the NBPD on tension and conflict within the community with past administrations felt this was within their purview to conduct the survey and obtain useful information that could be shared, as we continue to look at reform as well as improving community and police inter-relations.

The HRC representing the rights of all citizens of New Bedford believed from the onset if this was to be a credible and valid survey it would need to be disseminated to a diverse population.

Police reform is happening all over the country. Legislation is being offered at state levels throughout the country. This reform wave occurred through the publicity of several police shootings of black and brown men throughout the country. If not for the videotaping, and public viewing of each of these cases the country would not have known of any of these cases, or their names. It was the organization Black Lives Matter that put the lens on each one of these cases causing law enforcement agencies, the public and the courts to ponder the questions: Is this good policing? Did the punishment fit the crime? The victims became the faces of BLM and the impetus for reform. Some of the police behavior such as the George Floyd case or Briana Taylor was so egregious that it propelled the nation to start to look at reform and the practice of de-escalating encounters rather than the use of deadly force.

The purpose of this survey was to see what the public sentiment was of NBPD. What we see across the country has caused tension within our own community particularly among young black brown and white men and women. *Is the tension justified? Does policing in New Bedford mirror what we see in urban cities across America?* This is what we set out to learn with this survey.

## The Methodology

The HRC first comprised a list of questions that would provide the information needed for the assessment. We did not want the survey to be too long, but easy to respond to. It was important to enable the respondent to provide their experience. There were sixteen questions, the majority of the questions had yes or no answers. The questions were:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your race?
3. Have you ever been stopped by the police?
4. If yes how many times
5. Have you ever been arrested or received a citation
6. If yes for what?
7. Were you informed of your rights?
8. Was a police report filed?
9. What has been your experience with New Bedford Police?
10. What is your opinion of the New Bedford Police?
11. Do you trust the police?
12. Have you ever filed or tried to file a complaint form?
13. If no why?
14. Police reform is happening around the country, what do you think is the number one priority of change?
15. Can we contact you?
16. If yes, please provide your name, telephone number, or email address. Thank you.

The questions were designed to look at experiences of the population based on age and race to see if some of the perceptions that all sides had were valid. *Is there a culture in New Bedford policing that needs to be changed? Have there been improvements over the years and is New Bedford the exception rather than the rule when it comes to policing?* Lastly, the survey by asking respondents to provide contact information was important and useful because it allowed for communication beyond the survey for public meetings on policing, engaging and educating the public on information or changes they wanted to see. For example, one respondent commented on the fears she has for her brother who is autistic. She is afraid he could be misdiagnosed and arrested for his behavior. The respondent's honesty in providing that information also provides an opportunity for community engagement in policing, The HRC can share that info with the Chief or Captain of a station in her Ward. A call can be made to the respondent from the NBPd letting her know they have in their database information that someone residing in the home is autistic. When an officer is called to the residence, he or she is prepared for what they might be faced with. Perhaps having a trained social service provider with the officer, if available, could be utilized. Nearly half of the respondents provided their contact information which is

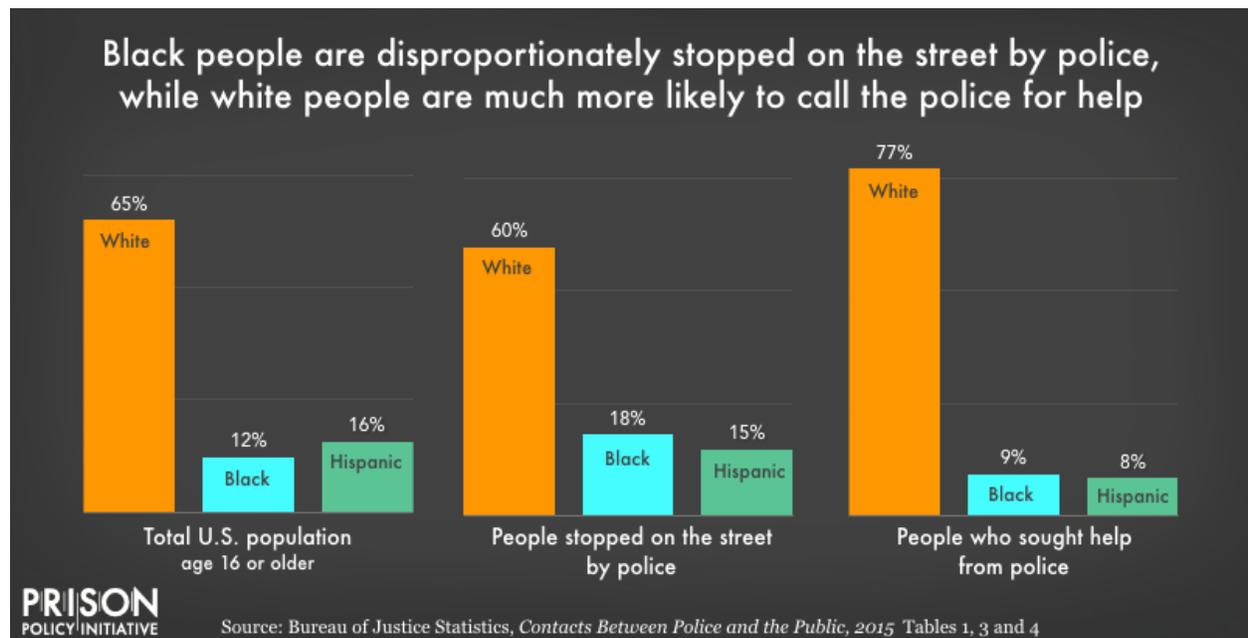
encouraging.)The survey was distributed too: The NAACP, OBVD, City Counselors, NBPD-included on their webpage, LGBTQ leadership, The Coalition For Justice , Against Poverty, CCT, CEDC, United Way, BREATHE, North Star Learning, Police Reform Commission, YWCA, Covid Collaborative, Equity and Justice, Third Eye, City Councilors, & HRC Webpage.

The information is being shared with the Mayor, City Council and Chief of Police. It is our view that if citizens of this community take the time to speak their truth and share their experiences we all should take the time to read their experiences which will enable all of us to have greater understanding beyond our individual views.

### Demographics

New Bedford's population is 95,000 people per the 2010 Census. The breakdown of the population is 62 % white, 6.6 % black and 20.1 % Hispanic. New Bedford has one of the largest Portuguese populations in the Country as well and has long been considered the capitol of Cape Verdean . The newest community is Central Americans from Guatamala. The response to the survey does correlate to the population of New Bedford, in that those who represent the smallest percentage of the population represent a greater number of arrests and stops.

Hence national data shows that Blacks and Browns have a different view of policing than whites. Blacks and Browns as seen by the graph below are disproportionately stopped on the street by police and compared to their white counterparts. Whites are more likely to call the Police for help. Most Police Departments to not compile data by race so many are guided by their perceptions of the need for police reform , Our survey reflects the differing view locally consistent with national data.



The survey was prepared in Spanish and Portuguese as well as English. We used the City of New Bedford Survey Program. The NBPD also posted the survey links on their webpage. We knew it was important to have the survey in multi languages so all that would have an interest in responding had access. New Bedford does have a large Cape Verdean Population, however Portuguese is the official language of Cape Verde and those in the City who are immigrants would understand the Portuguese survey. The greater population of Cape Verdeans speak English. We left the survey up for 2.5 weeks so it would not be manipulated in any way. The survey was a tool that any user could share with others to gain greater public participation.

## Survey Results:

138 responded to the survey in English and an additional 9 in Spanish and Portuguese for a total of 147 responses. Of the 138 English respondents 46 were non-white and 92 were white, 24 were black and 13 were Hispanic and 9 identified as other, Although the Department does not publicly share race based data, the survey does bring to the surface experiences that are different when we break the population down by race.

### *Why is that important?*

Without data one is left to their own perception of how good or bad the Police Department might be. When you add race you are able to see more stops or more of similar complaints by a certain population. Data also is a measurable tool for showing the merit of reform or lack of compliance.

Most of the respondents had been stopped by the Police, the range was 2-6 times, 65 had been arrested or received a citation. The majority of the stops were traffic violations.

In prior years the HRC has received complaints on difficulty in getting a police report or complaints that police reports weren't filed. The response to the survey indicates there is still a problem with receiving and filing of police reports.

In responding to experiences with NBPD and the public opinion of their experiences the common sentiment was that most police officers are fair and there were just a few respondents noting problem officers.

The question of Trust, and the response to it was worthy of discussion. The respondents were almost evenly divided but along racial lines there are some surprises. Of the English speaking respondents, 71 responded to yes on trust, and 64 responded to no or somewhat. With Hispanics, it was half yes and half no and somewhat. Among Blacks, more than half responded as somewhat rather than NO. This is interesting because it could be interpreted based on experiences reported that this population wants to work with the NBPD. They may not have had terrible experiences, but they know that problems exist. In short, Trust is a major problem that must be developed. This is a question that the NBPD should add on their website. *What would it take to gain the public trust?* Based on past complaints and current dialogue it would appear that citizens want to be treated fairly across the board. Consistency in policing in all parts of the City is what the public would like to see. It's another tool towards changing the culture of policing.

Police complaint forms are a very important tool in developing public trust, accountability and transparency. Unfortunately, the survey results showed 107 have never filed a complaint and 28 have. When asked why not, of course some did not need to, but others responded they didn't think anything would happen, didn't know they could, or fear of retaliation. The HRC has provided intake over the years on Police Complaint Forms. There is definitely a concern of retaliation or lack of credence in the process. Having worked with four Police Chiefs over the years, the HRC has observed major changes with regards to Police Complaint Forms. In the past, they were rarely mentioned publicly, and there was very little public outreach around them. Chief Cordeiro has made changes in officers assigned to this unit and a backlog of cases, spanning a number of years, was cleared up.

The HRC has not received inquiries for Police Complaint Forms since the latter part of 2013. There was a time when we saw a spike in complaints mostly in the North End of the City. Under Chief Cordeiro, with promotions and diversity in hiring, this has contributed to the lack of complaints we no longer receive. The NBPD website invites the public to fill them out if they have experienced a problem with New Bedford Police Officers. The HRC makes reference to their availability on its webpage also. This represents a significant shift in community engagement than we have not seen in prior years. Access to complaints also provides an avenue for accountability if the complaint is sustained. It serves to dispel the myth that police officers are untouchable which some of the respondents have alluded to.

On the question of reform, and what should the priorities be the top three responses were: Training-- The public was very specific in the type of training. They suggested implicit bias, cultural competency, mental health, de-escalation and the utilization of clinicians. The public recognizes that a lot is asked of Police Officers and all are not up to the challenges. The second area of reform was community policing and community engagement in policing. This is an area we believe NBPD is meeting and exceeding requirements. We believe under Chief Cordeiro Community Policing is the philosophy and priority with this administration. The Department has a community engagement page on their website and many community partnerships and programs are listed. However public perception is different within certain groups and that is due to the lack of trust. Some of the public in the first public meeting questioned why the HRC survey was on the police website. They felt uncomfortable to provide personal information and certainly not their contact information. Most of the public is not visiting the community website and is not knowledgeable on some of the changes that have developed. We know this to be true because some of the change they have called for already exist and they are not knowledgeable of that. This remains an area of opportunity in outreach by the NBPD.

Lastly, the third area of Reform was Transparency and Accountability. Although changes have been made to the Professional Standards Division, which reviews unprofessionalism and renders sustainable or non-sustainable on complaints, and although discipline of officers does occur, the public does not know of this. If Accountability and Transparency is to be developed there needs to be public reporting on an annual basis so the public has a sense that reform is happening and knowledgeable of changes that have been made. For example, the public should know what is available and not available in seeking public records requests.

One of the last questions that we added to the survey was Can we contact you? That question was purposeful. To our surprise, half of the respondents provided contact information. This again reaffirms the public's interest in working with the Police Department to better relationships. It opens the

opportunity for further dialogue with the public. It provides an opportunity to invite residents who have an interest in improving and developing Trust, to the table of purposeful dialogue. It provides an opportunity to provide useful information to concerned citizens which will go a long way in developing some of the things the public wants to see in the way of trust, accountability, & community engagement. It is our recommendation that the NBPD do more outreach with residents in letting them know if you have members of your household with health conditions or mental illness that you can make the Police Department aware of this information. Concerned citizens should submit the information so when an officer is dispatched the information on members of the household are viewed on the officers' computer making him or her better prepared for what they will face at the scene.

In our view, based on this survey, the general assessment of the NBPD is they are meeting and exceeding in its purpose of protecting and serving the public. The Department has a Cape Verdean Captain stationed downtown. The first Hispanic Captain, recently promoted is assigned to the South End station, and a Portuguese Captain is assigned to the North End. More female officers have been added to the force and the Chief continues to diversify the Department. Chief Cordeiro and Deputy Oliviera are men of the community, they are approachable and accessible, which sets this community above what we see within problem communities throughout the country.

On Trust, Transparency and Accountability- The following suggestions are offered based on past complaints and experiences shared. The public should be able to receive information on the number of complaints filed against an officer through internal affairs. This request should at least reveal how many complaints have been filed, it does not have to include details. It should also include whether the complaints were sustained or not sustained. This would be useful information when an officers' behavior is being questioned, to know past behavior. This would increase accountability because the public would question why bad behavior continues to exist which could possibly put the public in harm's way.

The ordinance for the HRC identifies reporting that NBPD should provide to the HRC. In the past, the HRC has made inquiries with past Chiefs and the standard reply was the information requested was not available. The HRC will meet with Chief Cordeiro and re-establish reporting requirements the ordinance empowers us to receive. The NBPD should report to the HRC on Bias Crimes. We would also like to add discriminatory complaints against police officers internal and external, as this falls within our purview. This information is important because it helps to identify trends within the City within law enforcement. It also enables another entity outside of the Police Dept to make recommendations or referrals. This would help in developing trust and accountability with the public.

Additionally, we recommend an Annual Report by the NBPD to the Mayor City Council and Community which includes all statistical data on crime and arrest, traffic violations, hires, promotions, and data should include race, age and demographics. This would allow the public do see changes from year to year and progress. It would enable the public to rely on data rather than one's own perception of the state of policing in New Bedford. Additionally, we recommend that the Captains host Community Conversations. The public within the survey and public meetings have shown a need to communicate. These conversations could be one per quarter enabling the public to know who the Captain is of their neighborhood station and talk about concerns, safety, crime while building a healthy relationship. It

gives NBPD a chance to let the public know more about programs and services available through the police dept that may not be familiar with.

The survey respondents were not younger than 19. We think it is important to conduct a survey with the age population 12-19. In 2013, the HRC partnered with NBPD is hosting "What to do if stopped by the police." We conducted public events at the alternative high schools and it was welcomed by the students. They engaged in role playing and we did break out sessions to determine what their experiences were and what needed to be changed. We think it is important to revisit this. and have literature prepared as part of that outreach. The NBPD does have info on their webpage on what you should do and we need to make sure this is drilled into the minds of young people. Trust comes when your told if you do a-b- and c you will be able to return home. There needs to be more outreach around this with young people but they also need to see this evidence in data reported. To that point, we believe data by race is essential in dispelling any mis-information believed on policing. This is the surest way to demonstrate how well a department is doing, and if there are problem areas you know where to put resources.

Getting young people interested in the profession of policing at a young age is essential to maintain a diverse workforce. We think more recruiting and working with schools and community colleges on intern programs would be advisable.

The Malcolm Gracia case hovers over any efforts towards reform within New Bedford which includes public input. There is an underlying tension and anxiety associated with the silence around this case. As a community, there can be no healing until the pains of the past are confronted. This goes a long way towards obtaining accountability and trust. Some believe that without the justice, they feel should have been rendered, nothing else matters. As Protestors have stated, No Justice No Peace. The HRC witnessed first hand at a City event it hosted in memory of Congressman John Lewis, how activists used a public event to draw attention to the Malcolm Gracia case and interrupt the program. We believe any efforts toward public engagement around Police Reform will be overshadowed by advocates of Justice for Malcolm.

*What can be done to resolve this conflict within the community?*

In our view, since 2012, there has not been another incident of its kind , albeit one is too many. What that shows is, the Department has made changes , One notable change is not enforcing and eliminating the Meet and Greet Policy implemented under Chief Provencher. There has also been a shift towards less lethal force and de-escalation within the department. The public needs to have this dialogue. Sometimes the absolute best you can do is to insure that a situation does not occur again. To openly engage in public dialogue and speak about elements of the case that can be discussed is necessary in developing trust, accountability and transparency and moving forward.

Police reform is happening throughout the country. It is a result of the attention that the organization Black Lives Matter has placed on the continuous death of men of color in situations that should not have been life threatening. These activists, who some did not take serious, have brought an urgency around injustices in law enforcement since its inception. This speaks to the power of a small number of relentless individuals to impact change. Some of the change that the public is advocating for will

happen at the state level and at the federal level as the Biden Administration has stated criminal justice system reform will be a priority. Changes at either level present an opportunity for Community Engagement to gain understanding and knowledge as well as public feedback on the changes. This is an opportunity the NBPD should initiate and the Human Relations Commission would be available to collaborate with NBPD on this community dialogue. It would go a long way in further developing community policing.

Finally, we have a police department led by a Chief, who is open for any and all communication. That puts the City of New Bedford in a greater place than most. We found no evidence in this survey of egregious behavior shared by the respondents. In our view, the NBPD has the resources and leadership to be a model department not only in Massachusetts but within the Country and the Public is ready and willing to engage.

Thanks to all who took the time to respond, we hope in some way sharing of this report proves useful. Our purpose is to do our part in helping our Police Department and community to co-exist peacefully and be that City of One. Your input is valued, your voices have been heard and apart of the public record.

The New Bedford Human Relations Commission

December 16, 2020