

EDITORIAL

Show us the stop-and-frisk data

Mayor Walsh and the Boston Police Department should release street-encounter data.

By **The Editorial Board** , Updated January 18, 2020, 4:00 a.m.



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If you want to know how much electricity City Hall uses or how many crimes were committed in Boston last month, you can find the latest data on the city's [Analyze Boston](#) website. But don't go looking for recent data on street encounters between police and community members, because you won't find it.

Since December 2016, the city has not published reports on [stop-and-frisk](#) situations, or as they are more benignly labeled by the city, “Field Interrogation and Observations” (FIO), on the site.

Whether those interactions between police and members of the community show evidence of racial disparities, or whether those disparities are driven by bias, remains a mystery because in place of those current numbers and incident reports is simply a blank page.

Stop-and-frisk policies remain a hot-button issue in urban policing and, according to the special directive issued in July 2015 by then-Police Commissioner William Evans, such practices by the Boston Police Department were to be recorded, monitored, and made public as a way “to increase community trust.”

“You cannot manage what you refuse to measure,” Carol Rose, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts said in a [recent interview](#) on the subject.

Rose’s comments were quickly followed by a letter from the ACLU to the Police Department making a formal public records request — and following a similar request made by the Globe — for all FIO reports beginning in January 2017 to the current date.

The reports on those street encounters continue to be filed by police officers and used internally, according to Sergeant Detective John Boyle, [who told the Globe](#) they are no longer being made public because no one had asked for them — at least not until the Globe did. He also noted that compiling the data was time-consuming. Oh, and the person who had been in charge of analyzing the data left for another departmental unit.

As fond as we are of the Rule of Three, three excuses — all of them rather lame — do not constitute a good reason for abandoning a policy that was, after all, forged under threat of a lawsuit.

Evans wrote in his 2015 directive that “officers must document the specific supporting information used to establish reasonable suspicion, to increase transparency in the FIO process, and allow the Department to better monitor and report out the reasoning for all citizen stops.”

It’s also true that 2015 was something of a golden age in police data transparency, beginning with the launch of the [Police Data Initiative](#) by the Obama White House. That enlisted city and state police departments around the country to build and release data sets, including those on both pedestrian and vehicle stops by police.

The goal of building credibility through transparency was a good one then, and it is now. Even in Boston, where it was fulfilled only under duress.

“Our goal is to post information online that is frequently requested by members of the public as part of our efforts to build a more transparent and open government,” a spokesperson for Mayor Marty Walsh said.

So data on electricity usage at City Hall is in great demand, but no one cares about interactions between the police and residents on the streets?

Boyle indicated the department *may* compile the information for public release this month. But it shouldn’t take a flurry of public record requests or threats of lawsuits to do the right thing. After all, the top guy — the mayor himself — was the same guy in charge in 2015. Walsh needs to mean what he says about transparency on the issues that count and see that the data are released quickly.

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