



POLICE STOPS

METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON, DC

March 2021

In July 2019, to enhance data collection as part of the [NEAR Act](#), authored by Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) launched changes to police processes and data systems to allow the collection of more data in discrete fields and enable greater data analysis of police stops. The result of these changes is comprehensive data on all MPD stops. MPD has published two reports based on the data collected—the [latest comprehensive report](#) is based on nearly 24 weeks of data (July 22 through December 31, 2019), and contains more information, including types of stops, searches or pat downs, locations, reasons, and demographics. The comprehensive data set is also available to the public on the [MPD stop data](#) page. This brief summary will be followed by a report in April 2021.

Between **January 1** and **December 31, 2020**, MPD collected data on approximately **81,000** police stops.

During the public health emergency associated with the global novel coronavirus pandemic, the average number of MPD stops per week decreased 43 percent compared to the 2019 reporting period. However, the nature of the stops remained consistent with the prior reporting period.



The stops had a clear purpose.

Almost four of every five stops resulted in enforcement action, either a ticket (55%) or an arrest (24%). The rest ended with investigation or other public safety response, such as mediating a dispute.



The stops included many people traveling in or through the District.

Only 31% of the vehicles stopped and issued tickets for traffic violations were registered in the District; 69% were registered in another state.



Most stops were resolved without any physical contact between the officer and the person stopped or his or her property.

Only 15% of stops involved a protective pat down (sometimes called a frisk) or a pre-arrest search of either a person or property.



MPD stops play a vital role in supporting Vision Zero and making our streets safe for all users.

Fifty-five percent of all stops result in a ticket. Of these, almost one-third of the tickets were warning tickets.



MPD stops can help remove guns from our neighborhoods.

Violent gun crime remains the city's most pressing public safety problem. MPD officers were able to remove 1,605 guns – 69% of all guns recovered – from DC streets as a result of these stops.



The stops were brief.

About three out of four were resolved in 15 minutes or less; 91% lasted 30 minutes or less.

What is a stop?

A temporary investigative detention of a person for the purpose of determining whether probable cause exists to make an arrest. A stop is a seizure of an individual's person and occurs whenever an officer uses his or her authority to compel a person to halt, remain in a certain place, or to perform an act (such as walking to a nearby location where the police officer can use a radio or telephone). If a person is under a reasonable impression that he or she is not free to leave the police officer's presence, a stop has occurred.

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Why do police stop people?

Broad public safety indicators – traffic crashes and fatalities, crime, and calls for service – are key drivers of stops made by MPD officers. Officers make stops for many reasons, including:



Identifying an area with frequent traffic violations and conducting stops to protect all roadway users – pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.

Observing a crime.

Receiving a call for service for a crime and conducting a stop based on information from a witness or credible source describing a suspect.

Serving a search or arrest warrant at the direction of the courts.

What else can we learn from the data?

Robert J. Contee, III, who was sworn in as the Acting Chief of MPD on January 2, 2021, recognizes that procedural justice and racial equity are key challenges facing the Department and the city. Even with stops that demonstrate a commitment to fair and constitutional policing, our data show that 74% of all stops made by MPD in the first half of 2020 were of Black individuals. Understanding sources of that disparity so we can appropriately focus resources to solve it continues to be a top priority for Chief Contee, MPD, and the District. As we strive for racial equity, harm reduction, and procedural justice in all of our interactions with the public, getting this right is critical. We know that everyone in the District wants to feel safe, but that some members of our community feel less safe when police are around. How can MPD both earn the trust of the community and ensure that community members are safe when faced with some of the most pressing problems in the city, such as gun violence and traffic safety?

Following the initial release of stop data in the fall of 2019, MPD began working with The Lab @ DC and Georgetown University's Innovative Policing Program to develop an evidence-based research and policy agenda on police stops for the District. Last summer, Howard University joined this effort, and together with The Lab and Georgetown, helped develop and conduct a seven-part workshop series to reimagine the role of police stops in public safety. This series convened over 130 diverse stakeholders, including community members, advocates, academic experts, and executive and frontline law enforcement, and set out to inform three key questions:

- Is there racial bias in stops made by MPD? If so, at what level(s) is this bias operating – individual, agency, and/or citywide?
- What are the effects of police stops? What are the benefits of this practice? What are the harms?
- What research and policy efforts can the District of Columbia and other jurisdictions undertake to better understand police stops and reduce harm while preserving public safety benefits?

The next step is for our partners to translate the workshop insights shared into the following deliverables, which are currently in development:

- A white paper detailing the discussions/findings emerging from the workshop series;
- A suite of expert and evidence-based recommendations for harm-reducing policy and programmatic interventions related to stops for potential implementation (and evaluation) in DC and other interested jurisdictions; and
- A literature review and measurement guide for quantifying bias, harms, and benefits from stops, along with a research agenda on the role of stops in public safety for the District, to be translated into a request for proposals and, eventually, DC-specific evidence and recommendations.

Chief Contee looks forward to ongoing engagement with the community and our project partners to reimagine stops and policing, as informed by community input and sound research, policy, and practice.

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To access stop data, visit mpdc.dc.gov/stopdata.