Innovative Practices in Traffic Enforcement Equity and Engagement

By: Ken Barone, Associate Director
Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy, UConn
Brief History of Connecticut Reforms

• 1999: Connecticut enacts The Alvin W. Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act (Public Act 99-198)
• 2012: Connecticut makes major reforms to the law
• 2013: Requires all 107 police agencies to begin electronically collecting and reporting traffic stop data.
• 2015: First study was published
• 2016-Present: 7 statewide studies annually.
Why Traffic Stop Data?

• On average, Connecticut law enforcement agencies conduct approximately **550,000** traffic stops a year.
  • The total number of traffic stops has been significantly impacted since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

• **Traffic stops are the most common encounter police have with the public.**

• Issues of race and traffic stops brought to the forefront
Fundamental Questions to Address

• Do racial and ethnic disparities exist in traffic stop data?
• What are the factors driving the disparities that are identified?
• What interventions are most effective at reducing/eliminating racial and ethnic disparities and also improving roadway safety?
The Connecticut Model - Four Phases

• Phase 1: Continuous data collection
• Phase 2: Empirical analysis of the data
• Phase 3: In-depth analyses for identified high-disparity agencies, including an officer-level analysis.
• Phase 4: Community forums and conversations
The Preponderance of the Evidence Approach

• Advantages of Connecticut’s approach
• Guide for policymakers and policing administrators
• No single method is able to fully capture all dimensions of disparity.
• Our approach helped build stakeholder confidence in the findings.
Departmental Intervention

• Each year, all 107 departments are evaluated
• Those identified as high-disparity are invited to an in-depth analysis with researchers.
• What are the factors contributing to racial and ethnic disparities in traffic stop data for departments identified in the annual analysis?
• There is not a one size fits all approach.
Community and Stakeholder Input

• Public forums are conducted in communities with high disparity agencies.
  • Researchers **present findings**
  • Police administrators are invited to provide **comment/feedback**
  • **Thoughtful discussion** occurs between the public, police, and researchers about the findings and next steps.
Intervention Success Stories

• Since 2015, Connecticut has conducted 9 statewide studies.
• 32 municipal police agencies and 5 State Police Troops were identified as “high disparity agencies.”
• Interventions were conducted in all agencies.
• Success stories: Newington, and Hamden
Slow and Steady Wins the Race

• The last three calendar year statewide reports have shown **significant reductions** in racial and ethnic disparities statewide.

• Far **fewer departments** are being identified as “high disparity agencies.”
State Highway Safety Offices are Critical to Program Success

• Connecticut Department of Transportation’s Highway Safety Office.
  • The 1906 program provides the critical support to maintain our program.

• It is possible to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in traffic enforcement and improve roadway safety at the same time.

• State Highway Safety Offices play a critical role in understanding this research and disseminating effective enforcement techniques to their law enforcement partners.
Other Program Benefits

• The accumulation of a rich dataset is now available with 92 million data points from 4 million traffic stops.

• We consistently look for win-win solutions during our departmental interventions (i.e., improved roadway safety and reduced disparities).

• Our research has been able to substantially contribute to the ongoing conversation about traffic safety in Connecticut.
Research Highlights worth Noting

• No evidence that participation in Highway Safety Office safety programs contributes to statewide or departmental disparities.

• Racial and ethnic disparities are significantly decreased when law enforcement primarily focuses on safety-related violations
  • Examples: speeding, distracted driving, following too close, traffic light violation
Conclusions

• The section 1906 program has been critical to the success in Connecticut.

• Coordinated state and national data collection and analysis is essential to help advance equity in traffic enforcement.

• Good data will allow you to identify the strategies that reduce fatalities, injuries, and disparities, all at the same time.
Thank you!

• For more information, please visit www.ctrp3.org
• Email: ken.barone@uconn.edu