

**Task Force on Racial Equity policing recommendations:
President's response**

January, 2021

The horrific murder of George Floyd and other fatal police actions against Black people helped galvanize reform efforts in hundreds of American communities last summer. Members of the Michigan State University community likewise were outraged and joined calls nationwide for police reform.

As part of my charge to the Task Force on Racial Equity, MSU Professor of Criminal Justice Jennifer Cobbina led a working group focused on the responsiveness of the [MSU Police Department](#) to issues of racial equity. I have met with her, Interim Police Chief and MSUPD Director Doug Monette and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee. We all agree the police department should be held to high standards of training, performance and accountability. That includes consideration of reforms to address the needs of diverse members of the MSU community.

Expanding Inclusion and Anti-Bias Unit

I believe a number of this task force working group's recommendations are actionable in a reasonable time frame. Those include its call to expand the MSUPD's Inclusion and Anti-Bias Unit. A pending reorganization of the department is expected to improve the alignment of resources in this direction and establish an outreach team within the IABU that would utilize community policing concepts. Additionally, new community outreach programming will help extend collaboration with MSU units and anti-bias training for personnel.

Currently, professional development and programming for community engagement and partnership occur through the IABU. The MSUPD also conducts supportive activities such as an all-day Strengthening Race Relations event at Kellogg Center and lunch meetings with invited specialists.

Importantly, the department participates in the local chapter of Advocates and Leaders for Police and Community Trust, which is facilitated by the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion. Members include law enforcement, community, advocacy and civil rights leaders dedicated to examining issues affecting police and community relations and the law's discriminatory enforcement.

Budget and services

The MSUPD budget is reviewed each year and is subject to MSU's annual 1% efficiency reduction. Like other campus units in fiscal year 2021, an additional 3% base budget reduction was made due to financial constraints caused by COVID-19.



**Office of the
President**

Hannah Administration Building
426 Auditorium Road, Room 450
East Lansing, MI 48824

517-355-6560
Fax: 517-355-4670
president.msu.edu

The MSUPD is exploring improvements to analyzing call response metrics, as the task force recommended, and exploring options for joint response with MSU Counseling and Psychiatric Services. All MSU officers are trained in trauma-informed interviewing and victim-centered investigations, and provide victims and survivors with campus-based and off-campus resources to work through their experiences. The MSUPD also participates in the Hope Not Handcuffs program, which partners with substance abuse treatment facilities.

A crisis intervention trainer is on MSUPD's staff, and all officers are trained in mental health first aid for assisting individuals experiencing a mental health crisis or who have neurocognitive challenges. The department's annual de-escalation training, which includes working with individuals who have communicative disorders, could be expanded to include those with hearing impairments.

The department's social worker, communications specialist and other positions could be better aligned to support the IABU with the department's reorganization. New hiring, except for the search for a new chief and director, is paused as part of the response to the financial impacts of the novel coronavirus pandemic. When hiring does occur, MSUPD follows university protocols and procedures as an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer.

Diverse backgrounds and special language skills are already highly desired attributes in hiring and recruiting, as are mental health or social work qualifications. The department also seeks individuals who have knowledge of and demonstrated experience working with members of underrepresented and marginalized groups, and maintains partnerships with campus units that have expertise in those areas. MSUPD requires officers to possess a bachelor's degree to reflect the community they serve.

The stress encountered by police officers is addressed through mental health services provided through MSU's Employee Assistance Program. Sessions are offered to the entire department multiple times a year, and supervisors offer EAP assistance to employees who witness or experience a violent or tragic event.

Oversight and accountability

The areas mentioned above are just a sample of current or potential policies and programs that can be responsive to the working group's report. Other recommendations are contingent on external factors. For example, state certification requirements establish police as law enforcement officers, not as peace or public safety officers as the task force recommended. Additionally, the Police Oversight Committee is established in accordance with state law with a specific charge and membership requirements, including faculty, staff and student representatives. I welcome further conversation on this topic, but we also need to continue to adhere to state law and academic governance processes for membership selection.

Information about the department and its current mechanisms to ensure safety and broad oversight is currently provided at student and parent orientations.

Any allegations of a criminal nature will be conducted externally by the Michigan State Police or other appropriate law enforcement agencies. Allegations of non-criminal misconduct involving policy violations are currently handled, depending on the nature of the alleged violations, by the Office of Institutional Equity, Human Resources or the MSUPD's internal affairs division. Additionally, the university maintains the [MSU Misconduct Hotline](#) through the Office of Audit, Risk and Compliance.

Exit interviews for those leaving the department are offered at the department and university level, but can't be required.

Safety and service

While I've followed the national conversations surrounding policing and entertain all viewpoints, some recommendations can't be reconciled today while still protecting our community, officers' own safety, emergency response and other vital services. One has to do with the necessity of carrying a weapon. Even when there may appear to be no imminent threat, many situations are unpredictable, and officers must be prepared. For similar reasons, the armored rescue vehicle mentioned in the recommendations is maintained by the MSUPD for emergency and protective purposes. It was utilized last month in conjunction with other local law enforcement agencies to safely defuse an off-campus dangerous active shooter situation that posed a threat to public safety.

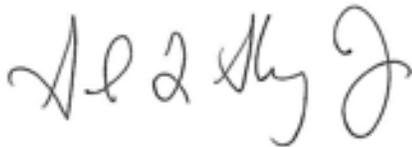
Still, MSUPD emphasizes non-escalation and de-escalation techniques in training, and all uses of force are reported and reviewed. Tear gas is not used by MSUPD, but pepper spray is carried as a non-lethal and seldom-used option regulated by department policy.

Forbidding police to monitor public protests, as recommended, could jeopardize the safety of the community, including that of protesters themselves. Officers are bound by statutes and guidelines to enforce the law when they do, but clear protocols and policies are in place for avoiding escalation, such as by issuing multiple warnings. Our officers also distribute Know Your Rights material provided by the American Civil Liberties Union to participants at protests and have received positive feedback for their services in such situations.

Reducing the number of officers, another recommendation, isn't consistent with the imperatives of safety, with 10,000 calls for service recorded in 2019. The department currently operates with 75 officers — 11 fewer than allocated in the past — but averages an emergency response time of just two minutes. The department needs the tools and resources to do its job with the effectiveness and professionalism we expect.

I believe there is much in this set of recommendations that deserves consideration or further study, and I commend and thank the members of the policing area working group for their diligent work. I also want to thank the members of the MSU Police Department for their ongoing service and dedication to the safety of our campus community.

We will continue to update you on progress made toward implementing these recommendations, as ensuring the safety and well-being of all Spartans is my top priority.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. L. Stanley Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Samuel L. Stanley Jr., M.D.
President