



City of Cambridge Police Department

TELEPHONE
(617) 349-3237

FAX
(617) 349-3320

WEB
www.cambridgepolice.org

Robert C. Haas
Police Commissioner

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

June 30, 2010 Press Conference Robert C. Haas, Police Commissioner Statement

PART I:

The arrest of Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on the 16th of July 2009 and the series of events that followed in the wake of that incident was a particularly challenging time for the entire City of Cambridge, including the city's leadership and the members of the Cambridge Police Department. This is a city that takes great pride in the richness of its diversity and commitment to being forward thinking and innovative. It is a place of learning and in many ways a living social laboratory, always willing to try new things and push the envelope in terms of building a stronger community. It is a city that I have found to be remarkable, with a police force staffed with men and women who believe in their profession and their mission to its community, and who have a particular sensitivity to the special nature of our community.

The national reaction to the set of events last summer shocked this city and its police department to its core. The City of Cambridge and the Cambridge Police Department have never before faced such a difficult situation under the intense scrutiny of a nation. But with every crisis comes a great opportunity to create positive and forward moving change.

I'm proud to have worked with such a talented group of police professionals as we made our way through that storm. I'm especially impressed that the Cambridge Police Department continued to strive to meet the expectations of this wonderful city and didn't allow the speculation of others to erode their love and devotion to this community.

I'd like to thank City Manager Bob Healy for his continued support and confidence; to thank Judge Joyce Alexander Ford for her guidance and advice throughout this process and Jennifer Flagg for the hard work and advice she provided to me and the Department over the last year.

Last September, the Cambridge Review Committee was formed to identify what might be learned from the experience of July 16th and make recommendations to the city and the larger national police community. That report is now complete and available on our website. I'm grateful to the members of the Committee who volunteered their time to discuss such a complex set of issues. Their individual counsel and viewpoints have certainly influenced me greatly in terms of moving the Cambridge Police Department in a direction that I am confident will further enhance our overall effectiveness of policing here in the city.

PART II:

While the Committee was meeting, we began to reassess how we address issues of conflict and intervention, not waiting until the Committee made its final recommendations. We began to explore and experiment with approaches in three specific areas: training, relationships with the community and communications.

Training

The national conversation that followed the arrest of Professor Gates underscored my belief that the current model of policing did not adequately address the reality of interacting with highly diverse communities.

Officers have been taught that safety always trumps any action to be taken; which inevitably shapes the course of the interaction and can interfere with the officer's ability to reach a successful outcome. The actions taken by police are often misinterpreted on the part of individuals and thus erode confidence and legitimacy of the police department by those with whom police have encountered.

This is precisely why it is so important to have greater appreciation of how people with whom the police interact view police actions; such as Professor Gates, who interpreted the action of the police in response to a call for a breaking and entering as one where he was being treated differently because of his race. The notion that a police officer's best defense against being accused of acting with bias is to treat everyone alike is incorrect. Officers need to understand that accusations of profiling are not just about the reason for the encounter – but more importantly, more about the quality of the treatment during the encounter.

Tracey Meares, Deputy Dean of the Yale Law School, and also a committee member, has been conducting a series of trainings at the department that focuses on legitimacy in the community. From this training, officers are coming to understand how the public perceives their interaction with the police is just as important – and in some cases more important – than the actual outcome. These trainings have generated some remarkable conversations and really challenge some of the more traditional approaches that the police have been

trained to use. We will continue to embrace this important principle as we work as trusted partners within our community and the city we serve.

We have also begun a series of conversations with both the MIT and Harvard University Police Departments to find opportunities where we can work in greater collaboration, share our collective guiding principles, and build stronger relations between our police agencies. One such initiative is to start doing joint in-service trainings where all three departments are represented and there is a greater uniformity in how we carry out our policing missions, thereby lending itself to fewer disconnects when an officer from any one of the departments encounters individuals in a response to a call for service, or while officers are carrying out their regular duties.

Many of you are now acquainted with the analysis that Lieutenant Daniel Wagner from Cambridge Police Department did relative to disorderly arrests in the city. This analysis is also available on our website.

Coincidentally, the New England Center for Investigative Reporting was also doing an independent analysis of disorderly arrests over a five-year period. It was gratifying that the research showed that this Department does not discriminate in their application of disorderly conduct charges.

However, I believe this research has revealed an important and viable means whereby police administrators have another tool to use in monitoring and assessing the use of police discretionary authority in real-time. This new tool will also help shape the essential elements that need to be present when officers are considering making an arrest in what they perceive as disorderly situations, and guide against making the decision to arrest solely when they believe the offense is simply a challenge of their official authority.

This is a national issue for policing. Aside from the training implications, I believe that by looking at this subset of arrests, police administrators can better inform their officers as to the policies and guidelines to be followed in preventing the potential misuse of their discretionary authority. So what are the other alternatives to arrest, and where does arrest fall on that continuum? It is a question that begs to be answered, and I believe there are definitive ways to answer that question that builds upon the public trust and belief that the police are acting in a fair, impartial, and equitable manner.

Relationship with the Community

Recently, I reached out to several people in Cambridge to begin the process of forming a community advisory group. That group will meet soon, and will initially have members such as Bishop Green and Richard Harding, who have agreed to assist me in increasing our sensitivity to Cambridge citizen perspectives on community safety and policing.

It is not enough that our data shows that we don't discriminate. Only by developing those relationships throughout the Cambridge community can we develop the legitimacy required to establish community confidence in the police.

To further that goal, we have begun to explore alternative dispute resolution and mediation techniques to address negative interactions citizens may have with officers. While we are fortunate to receive few citizen complaints, there are times when an interaction does not go well from the perspective of the citizen or the officer. During the course of this past year, the department has begun to investigate the impact and efficacy of using alternative resolution and mediation methods as a means of responding to a citizen complaint of rude and discourteous treatment. What in many police departments has been a passive, reactive and punitive process in response to complaints that are substantiated, by using this new approach we have found some remarkable outcomes that have both benefited the aggrieved individual and provided the officer with a better understanding of the complainant's perceptions of the interaction. This initiative has been guided by Professor Jack McDevitt, Associate Dean for Graduate Research at Northeastern University, and also a committee member.

Communication

It was clear to me during the difficult times in the weeks following the arrest that the department needed to improve the way it handled communication, both internally and externally. We have hired a communications professional Dan Riviello, and with his assistance, have launched a Facebook Page (Cambridge Police Department) and Twitter account (@CambridgePolice) to reach out to a generation of people who receive and exchange information through social networking. We have also trained our senior command staff in communications issues.

The work of the Committee, particularly their discussions about the complexity of these situations and interactions, has been enormously helpful to the department - and thus the City of Cambridge - in strengthening the department's ability to meet the high expectations of our community. The Committee is truly a remarkable group of people who have formed the basis for beginning not only a conversation here in Cambridge, but one with impact across the country.

I believe their work will help Cambridge and its Police Department to serve as a learning center for the rest of the nation.