

**Recommendations**  
**for**  
**Cornell University**  
**Public Safety Reform**

**The Cornell Public Safety Advisory  
Committee (PSAC)**

**July 27, 2021**

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## Abstract

In response to the ongoing national and global reckoning with law enforcement and racial justice, President Martha Pollack charged Cornell's Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) in summer 2020 with evaluating and reimagining the university's safety and security protocols through a methodical, open, and inclusive process. This report is the culmination of nearly one year of research and deliberation by the committee and various stakeholders, including student, staff, and faculty feedback gathered through a campuswide survey and specialized focus groups. The committee submits four recommendations, listed below, with further details of and rationale for each provided in the report.

We recommend that:

- 1. Cornell's senior leadership issue a public statement recognizing the damage wrought by the history of racialized policing in the United States and committing the university to enacting anti-racist public safety.**
- 2. The university implement an alternative public safety and response model, to be designed by a working group charged to conduct comprehensive, data-driven, and comparative research and to be fully operational within two years of this report.**
- 3. A PSAC subcommittee design and implement a communication campaign informing the Cornell community of when and who in the Cornell University Police Department (CUPD) and alternative units should be called when in need of health and safety services.**
- 4. The university recruit, train, and deploy a diverse workforce specifically tailored to public safety within a university setting.**

## Executive Summary

While the PSAC has existed for decades, the events of this past year brought unprecedented urgency to its function of identifying and recommending improvements to public safety at Cornell. Last summer's murder of George Floyd by former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin sparked a movement to transform policing and reimagine public safety that has spread throughout the nation and around the world. Over 20 million in the United States and hundreds of thousands more abroad took to the streets with demands for change ranging from public safety reform to police abolition. Near every aspect of police behavior, from recruitment and training to tactics and weaponry, has come under fresh scrutiny. Yet since George Floyd's death, over 1,000 more people have been killed in the United States due to police use of force. Sixty-four individuals were killed by law enforcement just in the time it took to complete the testimony in Chauvin's trial. More than half were Black or Latinx. Clearly, the status quo is unacceptable.

While there are many members of the Cornell community who, based on their experiences on campus and beyond, view the Cornell University Police Department (CUPD) with favor or indifference, there are also many who feel a deep sense of misgiving and foreboding in the presence of armed police generally. The results of our survey, conducted in February 2021, suggest that the majority of faculty, staff, and students interact only rarely with the CUPD; of the 7,615 individuals who responded to our survey, only 26% had interacted with the CUPD since January 2019. (Of note, survey participants were asked to characterize any interactions with the Cornell police during a time period, Jan. 2019 to Feb. 2021, that coincided in part with the COVID-19 pandemic, during which student, faculty, and staff access to campus was significantly reduced.) Most respondents reported satisfaction with the CUPD (72%), but these feelings were fractured across lines of race, ethnicity, and gender. In assessing the findings, Cornell's Office of Institutional Research and Planning reported that "under-represented groups within the Cornell community by race, gender, and sexuality are consistently more likely than the average survey respondent to express dissatisfaction with the CUPD."

Moreover, the same dataset revealed that a meaningful proportion of our community and the majority of some subgroups feel threatened by the presence of armed police on campus. Our survey indicated that nearly one-third of survey respondents (30%) reported feeling "uneasy" or "frightened and anxious" around armed police. These reactions were more prevalent among students (35%), with nearly half of Black, Latinx, American Indian, or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander student respondents (45%) reporting unease or worse. Most striking was the prevalence of such anxiety among Black student respondents, with over two-thirds (69%) responding in the same way. Given the ongoing incidence of police violence against marginalized individuals occurring across the country, the feelings of fear and anxiety experienced by our minority respondents are reasonable reactions to a real liability. The committee believes that all community members have a right to feel safe on our campus and that the presence of such racially disproportionate impacts calls for a vigorous response.

Following George Floyd's murder, calls for change across the country have ranged from reform to abolition. The latter was beyond the scope of this past year's effort, as PSAC was directed from the outset that the university would not disband or wholly disarm the CUPD. As such, our recommendations, each of which are part of an interconnected whole, will serve to model anti-racist public safety.

Because we cannot change what we do not acknowledge and confront, **we recommend that President Pollack and Cornell's senior leadership acknowledge that the police have done great damage to people of color and other marginalized communities in this country and commit the university to anti-racist public safety reform.** From this nation's founding there have been and continue to be significant racial and economic distortions regarding whom the law applies to and how it gets enforced. Over the centuries and across the continent, police agencies have served as enforcers for political machines, as the backbone of Jim Crow, and as a tool for

underpinning continued economic inequality and exploitation. Arising from slave patrols in the antebellum south and from strike-breakers in the industrial north, policing has a long and ignoble record. We agree with the former head of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, who in 2016 offered an official apology to people of color on behalf of the organization's 23,000 members, "for the actions of the past and the role that [policing] has played in society's historical mistreatment of communities of color."<sup>1</sup> Only by acknowledging this history, both recent and remote, can we hope to break from its grip.

But the problem is wider than policing's history; it includes the changing nature of contemporary society's urgent needs for specific types of assistance. Far too often, on campus and around the country, police are summoned to provide services for which they have not been adequately trained. Some matters are so trivial that they do not require a potentially escalatory police response. Other matters, such as crimes of poverty (e.g., unhoused individuals seeking shelter in university buildings) and those involving medical or emotional distress, are more suited to alternative responders. Consequently, as an outgrowth of our first recommendation, and as a means to implement an anti-racist public safety model at Cornell, the university must limit the responsibilities of armed CUPD officers in favor of alternative service providers to address the health and safety needs of the campus and surrounding community.

Accordingly, **our second recommendation calls for a fully operational alternative public safety model for the university within two years of this report.** Given the importance and the complexity of public safety operations, Cornell's alternative model must be created through a patient, collaborative process that involves all stakeholders. A working group will address such matters as: determining which calls and duties require armed officers; defining the duties of the alternative providers and the sources and limits of their power; recruiting and training alternative responders; redesigning dispatch protocols, if necessary; and reframing the overall structure of the university's new combined public safety operations, including the differences between the CUPD and alternative providers and how these units do or do not interact.

Additionally, **the committee recommends that the university undertake a sustained, comprehensive campaign to educate community members about the proper use of both the CUPD and newly formed alternative providers.** While the working group redesigns campus public safety and limits the duties of armed officers on campus, the campus community must, concurrently, learn about the racially disproportionate risks caused by relying on police for assistance with non-emergency situations. The broader campus community must understand itself as collaborating with campus providers as co-creators of our public safety. Our public safety dispatch teams and the broader campus community need shared knowledge of the appropriate responses to observed events. Our vision calls for individuals in our community to make

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<sup>1</sup> Jackman, Tom, "US Police Chiefs Group Apologizes for 'Historical Mistreatment' of Minorities" *Washington Post*, October 17, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/true-crime/wp/2016/10/17/head-of-u-s-police-chiefs-apologizes-for-historic-mistreatment-of-minorities/>

distinctions among threatening criminal events that require an immediate police response, acute mental health emergencies, and calls for services, access, oversight, intervention, or assistance.

Finally, racial bias in policing is systemic and structural, and diversifying police forces alone cannot solve the problem. However, if public safety personnel become more representative of the communities they serve, this, in conjunction with other strategies, can help ease antagonisms and open lines of communication and trust. **The committee therefore recommends that Cornell's leadership commit to recruit, train, and deploy a police force that achieves cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. We also recommend that the CUPD and all campus safety organizations prioritize transparency and empathy in their recruitment, training, and operations processes.**

## Background

Many universities are re-evaluating the roles of police on their campuses. Protests at the national level, in our local community, and on the Cornell campus make it clear that the current situation is not sustainable. Public safety depends on mutual trust and respect between the police and the communities they serve. The success and safety of our campus depends on strengthening this mutual trust.

On July 16, 2020, President Pollack issued a [statement](#) outlining new initiatives to promote racial justice. In that message she acknowledged that the Cornell University Police Department is committed to anti-racist policing; nonetheless, she called for improved transparency and commitment to just and equitable enforcement and charged the Public Safety Advisory Committee, which has existed at Cornell for several decades, to reassess CUPD policies, procedures, and training and report to Executive Vice President Joanne DeStefano. The PSAC was directed from the outset that the university would not disband or wholly disarm the CUPD but was given freedom to explore any other potential solutions.

[State education law requires](#) that universities have an advisory committee on campus security to review policies and procedures and make recommendations for improvement. The composition of the 12-member committee is also prescribed by New York state. One-third of its membership is nominated each by student governance, the faculty leadership, and university leadership. Executive Vice President DeStefano was responsible for naming the four members representing the institution and purposely nominated one staff member and two additional students to increase student representation. Current membership includes six students (three graduates, three undergraduates), four faculty, one staff member, four ex-officio members, and one vacancy.

## PSAC Membership

### *Chair:*

Joanne DeStefano, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer

### *Committee:*

Sahara Byrne, faculty, Professor, Communication, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Uchenna Chukwukere '21, student, College of Arts and Sciences

Liz Davis-Frost, graduate student, College of Human Ecology

Andrea Haenlin-Mott, staff, ADA Coordinator for Facilities and Campus Services

Conor Hodges '21, student, College of Arts and Sciences

Kavya Krishnan, graduate student, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Mark Lewis, faculty, Professor, Operations, Research, and Information Engineering, College of Engineering

Joanie Mackowski, faculty, Associate Professor, Literatures in English, College of Arts and Sciences

Joe Margulies, faculty, Professor of Practice, Law and Government, Cornell Law School

Anuli Ononye '22, student, College of Arts and Sciences  
Nate Rogers, graduate student, College of Engineering

*Ex-Officio:*

Rick Burgess, Vice President, Facilities and Campus Services

David Honan, Chief of Police

Peggy Matta, CUPD Compliance Administration

Sam Radloff, Executive Assistant to the Executive Vice President

## **Process**

The confines of this report do not allow for a comprehensive account of the committee's efforts and deliberations over the past year, but complete findings and meeting minutes are available on the [PSAC website](#). Our first step was to assess the current situation with baseline information. CUPD Chief Honan provided data on a wide range of the department's practices and policies, covering its legal authority, organizational structure, budget, training requirements, hiring and recruitment, officer wellness, community engagement, service calls, 911 data on calls for service, complaints, use of force policy and activity, use of protective equipment, numbers of and reasons for arrests, and internal review process.

The committee invited several individuals to share their expertise and experiences. Joe Margulies, faculty and PSAC member, provided the committee with a history of policing; Avery August, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Presidential Advisor on Diversity and Equity, provided information and data on systemic racism; Vanderbilt University Senior Associate Vice Chancellor and Police Chief August Washington described the public safety transformation he led at his institution; Marla Love, interim Dean of Students, provided an update on Cornell's new Community Response Team (CRT); Mark Conrad, CUPD Director of Technical Systems and Business Administration, offered an overview of the university's dispatch systems.

During this time, the committee also developed a campus survey with Jason Hecht, Institutional Survey Research Associate with Cornell's Office of Institutional Research and Planning, and worked with third-party firm Southpaw Insights to develop and execute a series of inclusive focus groups with campus community members.

## **Survey**

A survey was launched in February 2021 and distributed electronically to 34,646 faculty, staff, and students on Cornell's Ithaca campus. The survey was available for two weeks and garnered 7,615 responses (22% response rate). Questions involved frequency of contact with and treatment by Cornell police, types of contacts, most important services, areas for improvement, the meaning of equity and justice regarding law enforcement, and invitations to make open-ended suggestions for improving transparency and for a new vision for campus police. The [results of the survey](#) were

made public on April 14, 2021. The committee intends to continue refining the survey tool and to conduct additional surveys at least every three years.

## **Focus Groups**

Southpaw Insights and the PSAC held 11 focus groups with 50 students, staff, and faculty to identify problems and potential solutions, in addition to an online discussion board, open for five days, with 40 participants. All 1,000+ survey respondents who expressed interest in participating in a focus group were contacted for consideration, and Southpaw screened candidates to ensure representation from various demographic groups. The [results of the focus groups](#) were made public on May 13, 2021.

## Recommendations

During our review, the committee identified four critical areas of emphasis: a public acknowledgement of systemic racial problems in public safety and commitment to anti-racist public safety reform at Cornell; implementation of an alternative public safety and response system, to be designed by a working group charged to conduct comprehensive, data-driven, and comparative research, and fully operational within two years of this report; development of a campaign educating Cornell community members about when and how to request public health and safety resources; and recruitment, maintenance, and deployment of a diverse public safety workforce through an inclusive process.

**Recommendation One: Cornell's senior leadership issues a public statement recognizing the damage wrought by the history of racialized policing in the United States and committing the university to enacting anti-racist public safety.**

### Rationale and Discussion

This statement, to be delivered as acceptance of this report, must acknowledge that policing in the United States is a structurally racist institution and commit the university to identifying and eliminating racially disproportionate outcomes in our campus public safety systems. Such a commitment falls squarely within the university [core value](#) for a *community of belonging* and in line with the findings of the [2017 Presidential Task Force on Campus Climate](#).

We believe that, for any of the PSAC's recommendations to succeed, the university must first commit itself to the principle that legacies of racism continue to influence contemporary public safety structures. This must be a positive, forward-looking commitment to take substantial anti-racist action with regard to public safety reform. Cornellians who feel unease with the current public safety structure will likely feel invalidated, as well as lose trust in our institution, if the leadership response to this report suggests that Cornell is already sufficiently anti-racist. By acknowledging that policing can be interpersonally neutral but still have systematically biased outcomes, Cornell will take the first step toward meaningful reform and away from the criminal justice system's ignoble history of structural racism.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, Cornell leadership must commit itself to address such deficiencies with courage and boldness commensurate with Cornell's reputation as a national leader in higher education.

Additionally, we recommend that the statement commit to continually examining Cornell's public safety infrastructure for racism and rectifying all problems found, including investigating the

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<sup>2</sup> Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation." *American Sociological Review* (1997): 465-480. And Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

Office of the Judicial Administrator (JA) protocols or Title IX procedures for biases in existing processes or sanctions.

This is a recommendation calling for a public commitment to continued anti-racism action. Honoring such a commitment will require implementing positive measures to alleviate the harms identified by this committee and to identify harms not yet known. We recommend, as a first step, limiting the responsibilities of armed CUPD officers in favor of alternative service providers trained to address the health and safety needs of the campus community. Results from our survey and focus groups, as noted in the executive summary, indicate that the community has differing feelings about the CUPD's role and performance. Some individuals reported positive interactions and commended the officers for their professionalism; some reported that officers singled them out without cause and treated them with disrespect and suspicion. Under-represented groups by race and gender were disproportionately likely to report dissatisfaction with the CUPD, consistent with national trends of community views of law enforcement.<sup>3</sup>

Within the Cornell community, nearly one-third of respondents overall and more than two-thirds of Black student respondents expressed unease, fear, or anxiety in the presence of the CUPD. Cornell's lack of alternative public health and safety service creates conditions under which community members are reliant on an institution — law enforcement — that creates racially unequal outcomes, represented by disproportionate unease and fear that minority Cornelians expressed in the survey. The voices of the community represented by our data are sending us a message: overreliance on police, specifically that caused by lack of alternative resources to handle calls for help, is not safe for people of color.

Without alternative service providers, some community members in crisis face a choice of summoning the institution they fear or requesting no assistance at all. Such indirect and unintentional production of racially inequitable impact is an example of structural racism.<sup>4</sup>

The survey and focus group data provide evidence that Cornell's public safety system is excessively dependent on the CUPD, and that such dependence is, at least in part, responsible for experiences of fear, anxiety, and mistrust which are racially inequitable in distribution. Public

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Meares, Tracey. "The Legitimacy of Police Among Young African-American Men." *Marq. L. Rev.* 92 (2008): 651-666. And Tyler, Tom R., Jeffrey Fagan, and Amanda Geller. "Street Stops and Police Legitimacy: Teachable Moments in Young Urban Men's Legal Socialization." *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 11, no. 4 (2014): 751-785. And Prowse, Gwen, Weaver, Vesla M. and Meares, Tracey L. "The State From Below: Distorted Responsiveness in Policed Communities." *Urban Affairs Review* 56, no. 5 (2020): 1423-1471.

<sup>4</sup> Omi, Michael, and Winant, Howard. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge. (2014) Reskin, Barbara. "The Race Discrimination System." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012): 17-35. Gee, Gilbert C., and Chandra L. Ford. "Structural Racism and Health Inequities: Old Issues, New Directions" *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 8, no. 1 (2011): 115.

commitment to alleviation of this and other racially disproportionate outcomes in public safety is crucial to beginning to repair the impacts detailed in the PSAC's survey and focus group reports.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For discussion of such impacts as social determinants of health, see Williams, David R., and Selina A. Mohammed. "Racism and Health I: Pathways and Scientific Evidence." *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 8 (2013): 1152-1173.

**Recommendation Two: The university implements an alternative public safety and response model, to be designed by a working group charged to conduct comprehensive, data-driven, and comparative research and to be fully operational within two years of this report.**

### **Rationale and Discussion**

The primary reform we recommend for Cornell’s Ithaca campus is a shift toward alternative response models, the conception and development of which shall be carried out across approximately one year (2021-2022) by a **working group to investigate alternative public safety models and the full execution of which shall be implemented within two years.**

According to CUPD officials, a majority of the department’s calls for service include “wellness checks” (a friend or family member concerned about a student’s welfare and unable to make contact), stolen bicycles (locked and unlocked), and minor vandalism and graffiti. CUPD officers respond to a great variety of situations: requests for assistance from the Ithaca or Cayuga Heights police departments, reports of criminal mischief, theft, harassing phone calls, violations of the Campus Code of Conduct, illegally parked vehicles, and suspected drug use. Incidents reported in a 45-day span of the [Daily Crime Log](#) include:

Officer dispatched to take a report regarding the theft of a ‘COVID Testing’ sign from the front of Willard Straight Hall. The sign was located and returned intact.

Officer dispatched to take a report from a student regarding the theft of various clothing items from the laundry room. Some of the articles of clothing were located in another washing machine.

Officer dispatched to take a report regarding a fire extinguisher discharged on the second floor by an unknown individual(s).

Officer dispatched to take a report regarding students in the common area of the building. It was determined that the students were authorized to be in there.

Officer dispatched to take a report regarding pine tree branches placed in the lap and on the arms of the A.D. White statue.

The CUPD is not the only police agency that routinely responds to nonviolent, noncriminal incidents. Law enforcement in the United States has traditionally been understood as comprising approximately 80% service provision (mediation, statement-taking) and 20% crime fighting

(issuing tickets, making arrests).<sup>6</sup> Recent analyses of police activity, however, suggest that police officers are employed even more frequently in situations which do not require their specific skill sets. Between 2010 and 2020, the Los Angeles Police Department found itself dispatched to violent crimes only 8% of the time.<sup>7</sup> In 2019 and 2020, police in Austin, Texas, spent less than 1% of their time responding to calls for service involving violence.<sup>8</sup> Here in Tompkins County, a recent analysis covering 2017 to 2020 found that less than 2% of police activity concerned violent crime.<sup>9</sup> According to Barry Friedman, Professor at the New York University School of Law:

Crime fighting actually is a very small part of what police do every day, and [the] actual work [police do] requires an entirely different range of skills, among them: mediation skills to address conflict, social work skills to get people the long-term solutions they need, interviewing and investigative skills to really solve crimes, and victim-assistance. Yet, police are barely trained in any of this, so, it is no surprise harm is the result.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, according to Laurie Robinson, who served as chair of President Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, people in the U.S. “have turned to police to handle a lot of problems in society that nobody else wanted to do — to handle issues around substance abuse, to handle issues around the homeless, to handle issues around mental health. I think [the police] would be very happy to hand off these responsibilities.”<sup>11</sup>

Police in the United States are expected to respond to a remarkably varied range of incidents unrelated to actual crime, many of which they are not trained to handle. Law enforcement resources are finite, and time spent on tasks best suited to alternative service providers is time not spent on the police-specific tasks of preventing and investigating crime. The PSAC believes this systemic resource incongruity to be reason enough to reassess, restructure, and reinvent public safety at Cornell. Yet the most crucial rationale for such reassessment is amelioration of the historical and ongoing relationship in this country between policing and racial injustice. On this point the conclusion of our [survey](#) and [focus group](#) efforts is clear: current public safety practices and the absence of alternative resources to the CUPD are responsible for racially disproportionate impacts,

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<sup>6</sup> Lamin, Sylvester Amara, and Consoler Teboh. "Police Social Work and Community Policing." *Cogent Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1212636.

<sup>7</sup> Rubin, Joel and Poston, Ben. "LAPD responds to a million 911 calls a year, but relatively few for violent crimes" *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-05/lapd-911-calls-reimagining-police>

<sup>8</sup> Asher, Jeff and Horwitz, Ben. "Assessment of Austin Police Department Calls for Service" AH Datalytics. July 2020. <https://austinjustice.org/assessment-of-apd-calls-for-service/>

<sup>9</sup> "Assessment of Public Safety Service Demand" in "Public Safety, Reimagined" Ithaca-Tompkins Public Safety Reform Collaborative. February 22, 2021. <https://www2.tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/2021-04/Master%20Final%20Document%20City%20of%20Ithaca.pdf#page=260>

<sup>10</sup> Friedman, Barry. "Disaggregating the Police Function." Forthcoming in *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* (2021) <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3564469>.

<sup>11</sup> Coleman, Aaron Ross. "Police reform, defunding, and abolition, explained" *Vox*, July 16, 2020. <https://www.vox.com/21312191/police-reform-defunding-abolition-black-lives-matter-protests>

including the current erosion of trust between campus law enforcement and significant portions of the broader Cornell community.

A significant percentage of the Cornell community feels less safe in the presence of armed officers.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, community members who do not themselves feel uneasy or afraid around armed police have voiced support for those who do feel that way. In a focus group session, one white student asserted that “[i]t is our duty to listen to the most disenfranchised students to support their learning environment.”

While the CUPD is generally felt to be a gentler force than the Ithaca Police Department or the Tompkins County Sheriff’s Office, survey and focus group responses from the Cornell community suggest that CUPD officers may have, at times, accorded less respect and more suspicion to Black and Brown community members than to white community members.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, comments expressed by some CUPD officers during [focus groups](#) conducted and reported by Southpaw Insights may indicate that some officers are not yet accepting of the community concerns noted above. Considering the diversity of Cornell’s student body and community reports of biased treatment from CUPD officers, these comments were concerning to the committee.

The structural problems that affect policing nationwide clearly also affect the CUPD and its ability to serve our community. Therefore, by researching existing alternative public health and safety practices and implementing appropriate reform on our own campus, the university will improve relations between the CUPD and the broader Cornell community by better matching the department’s operations to expressed community needs.

We recommend that a working group to investigate alternative public safety models (WG-APSM) be composed of representative experts and students from across campus. We recognize the heavy lift this working group will be required to undertake and suggest hiring an additional consultant or research team to assist with a more expeditious process.

The PSAC recommends that the WG-APSM be specifically charged with:

1. Investigating alternative public health and safety response models;
2. Applying lessons learned through a content analysis of Cornell calls for service and CUPD/Community Response Team (CRT) operations/responses;
3. Designing a comprehensive alternative public safety/health response model for Cornell.

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<sup>12</sup> According to the IRP survey, “Nearly one in three (30%) survey respondents expressed that they are made to feel ‘uneasy’ or ‘frightened and anxious’ by armed CUPD officers.” This anxiety was disproportionately reported by Black, American Indian, Latinx, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community members.

<sup>13</sup> Southpaw Insights reported that “The CUPD is seen as a gentler force in relation to other law enforcement agencies, including Ithaca Police and Tompkins County Sheriff departments.”

In pursuit of these goals, we recommend that the WG-APSM undertake the following three stages of model development across no more than two years, with the understanding that some aspects of the three stages may appropriately overlap:

### **Stage 1: Investigate existing models of public safety response in use elsewhere**

We believe that due to the diversity and particularities of alternative public safety models that currently exist, the working group must have a deep understanding of what is already being done and gather data on what types of structures would work best at Cornell. The PSAC alone does not have the capacity or expertise to undertake this effort. Further, we feel that a responsible investigative effort requires interviews and site visits to other campuses and cities that are already operating alternative response models.

It would be impossible to determine whether such reforms are substantive or superficial through press releases or contact with administrators alone. WG-APSM delegations should be prepared to observe and to document alternative response models with the understanding that they will represent the strengths and shortcomings of the programs they visit to the rest of the working group and to the PSAC. We recommend a process such as:

- Identify universities and additional sites (i.e., cities) that have already implemented alternative models for public safety. A sampling of illustrative alternative models is appended to this report.
- Request policy and structure documents from the sites. Develop critical questions and identify gaps in what can be known from existing materials.
- Meet with representatives from these sites virtually to ask questions and fill gaps.
- Identify four to six critical sites for in-person visits to observe public safety operations and meet with public safety leaders and staff, students, faculty, and community members.
- After completing external reviews, construct a philosophy of response to broad categories of need and follow it with a routing scheme for unique calls for service at Cornell.

### **Stage 2: Conduct a content analysis of Cornell calls for service and current Cornell public health and safety operations and undertake a matching project based on alternative models**

The WG-APSM should begin a collaborative assessment and audit with CUPD dispatch of all Cornell calls for service. This recommendation may call for hiring a content analysis research team or collaborating with Institutional Research and Planning.

The working group or contracted entity should identify and categorize the universe of public health and safety needs and consonant responses. After completing the outside investigation of alternative programs, the WG-APSM should draw on this knowledge to match categories of needs to categorized responders and processes. If, for example, the

audit reveals a need to connect unhoused populations with housing resources in order to reduce trespassing calls, the WG-APSM should develop a recommendation for addressing such a need. We recommend a process such as:

- Create a clean working dataset of all Cornell calls-for-service and responses through dispatch for the past five years.
- Draw upon the philosophy of response created in Stage 1 to match responses to Cornell-specific calls for service.

### **Stage 3: Build, test, and deliver a manual for public safety responses at Cornell**

Building upon what is learned in Stages 1 and 2, work with Cornell's Office of General Counsel and all campus partners to create a manual for responses that conforms to New York state and federal laws, codes, and standards. The manual should integrate with and build upon existing Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials standards and be tested through such processes as:

- Training a fresh team of "test coders" to match responses to calls for service, iteratively improving the codebook/manual until intercoder reliability is above .90.
- Preparing a report of specific gaps in current public safety structures at Cornell that limit our ability to respond according to the manual.
- Providing a final dispatch manual and any attendant recommendations to university leadership.

The second year of model implementation should involve practical execution of the new public safety model. Tasks will include hiring leadership and staff, extensive training of responders and dispatchers, and evaluating efficacy of public safety processes for continued improvement.

**Recommendation Three: A PSAC subcommittee designs and implements a communication campaign informing the Cornell community of when and who in the Cornell University Police Department (CUPD) and alternative units should be called when in need of health and safety services.**

### **Rationale and Discussion**

Communication about the CUPD, alternative providers, and the role they serve on campus is vital to promote campus safety and community cohesion. According to 911.gov, most people understand that they should call 911 in an emergency, but many fewer understand when not to call 911. As a result, many 911 requests do not involve true emergencies. Overloaded with non-emergency calls, 911 is less able to provide emergency assistance to those who need it.<sup>14</sup>

Most people rarely face emergency situations and lack firsthand experience with 911. They may have unrealistic expectations about what will happen when they contact 911, such as expecting the swift attention of public servants capable of solving any problem. In many communities, as at Cornell, the resource most readily available to dispatchers is often law enforcement. There is a growing need for targeted and well-coordinated public education efforts about how to use 911 appropriately, so as to better match public health and safety requirements with available resources.

The PSAC recommends that Cornell build and launch a public health and safety education campaign regarding what resources are available to community members and under what circumstances they should — and should not — be requested. The design of this campaign will likely require the focus and expertise of an outside vendor and should include the perspectives of members of the PSAC, the WG-APSM, telecommunications officers (dispatchers), campus public health and safety institutions (the CUPD, Community Response Teams, Cornell Health), students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders as needed.

As many in the [survey](#) and [focus groups](#) reported that they don't understand the CUPD's role and function on campus, an education and communications campaign will help to ensure the success and efficiency of new and existing public safety operations. Education will involve what the different campus safety organizations do and when to call one organization rather than another, depending on the situation (e.g., whom to call when locked out of a building, for a mental health crisis, for a noise complaint, or for an interpersonal conflict).

It is anticipated that the campaign will evolve and expand as the WG-APSM proceeds in its work to identify service needs and recommend response resources. Those organizing the campaign

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<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Jessica W. Gillooly's discussion of the 'gatekeeper' and 'risk-appraiser' functions of dispatchers in "How 911 Call-Taker and Dispatcher Decisions Impact Police-Civilian Encounters" in "'911, Is This an Emergency?': How 911 Call-Takers Extract, Interpret, and Classify Caller Information." PhD diss, University of Michigan, (2020) 63-86. <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/163046>

should work closely with the WG-APSM to identify education practices of sites currently operating alternative responder models and to implement appropriate key learnings at Cornell.

This education should be ongoing to account for the growth of public safety response options and annual changes to the composition of the Cornell community. What we recommend is not a trivial dissemination of information, but a vital process of learning, discovery, and self-reflection on societal positioning and its relationship to collective health and safety.

**Recommendation Four: The university recruits, trains, and deploys a diverse workforce specifically tailored to public safety within a university setting.**

**Rationale and Discussion**

Cornell’s student body is far more diverse than the police who serve them and the broader campus. According to the most recent composition numbers published on the university’s factbook dashboard, as of fall 2019, under-represented minority (URM) students (African American, Latino American, Native American and Hawaiian Pacific Islander) make up 23.3% of the undergraduate student population.<sup>15</sup> Other domestic minority students comprise 22.5%. Taken together, these students are 45.8% of the undergraduate student population. While graduate and professional students are 19% domestic minority students, 45.4% are international students (of any race). By contrast the Cornell police ranks are overwhelmingly composed of white individuals (84% male and 16% female) with only 7% minorities, which reflects both the upstate New York region surrounding Ithaca and the policing profession nationally.<sup>16,17</sup>

A core value of the university is “A Community of Belonging”<sup>18</sup> where:

*“...we strive to be a welcoming, caring, and equitable community where students, faculty, and staff with different backgrounds, perspectives, abilities, and experience can learn, innovate, and work in an environment of respect, and feel empowered to engage in any community conversation.”*

Yet, due to the specific origins of American policing — created by the racial group in power to control people not belonging to that racial group<sup>19</sup> — the current lack of racial diversity in the CUPD stands as an impediment to that goal of a community of belonging.

Our discussions and research have led us to believe that the Cornell community and the CUPD act as separate entities, with their relationships fraught as a result. This is deeply concerning since campus cohesion and safety depends on mutual trust between public safety officers and the community at large.

While the survey did not ask about satisfaction with the CUPD’s demographic makeup specifically, this topic was frequently addressed by survey and focus group participants and is

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<sup>15</sup>“Composition” Cornell Office of Institutional Research and Planning, (2021) <https://irp.dpb.cornell.edu/university-factbook/diversity/composition>.

<sup>16</sup> Denton, Nancy, Friedman, Samantha, and D’anna, Nicole. “Metropolitan and Micropolitan New York State: Population Change and Race-Ethnic Diversity 2000-2010” in “How the Other Third Lives: A Focus on Upstate New York” Lewis Mumford Center. [mumford.albany.edu/mumford/UpstateProject/geography.html](http://mumford.albany.edu/mumford/UpstateProject/geography.html).

<sup>17</sup> Reaves, Brian A. “Local Police Departments, 2013: Personnel, Policies, and Practices.” U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd13ppp.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd13ppp.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Cornell University Core Values, <https://www.cornell.edu/about/values.cfm>

<sup>19</sup> Presentation on the history of policing in the United States given to the PSAC by Joe Margulies, Dec. 21, 2020.

supported by responses to indirect questions. For example, while the survey revealed that most people are generally satisfied with the CUPD, a significant portion of those who feel satisfied have never interacted with the department. Controlling for respondents who have interacted with the CUPD, it initially seems that people who have had an interaction are generally more satisfied than those who have not. However, of those who have interacted with Cornell police, a substantial number of satisfied respondents are staff members, who are overwhelmingly white.

An optimistic but naive conclusion from these results might be that more interactions correlate with positive impressions, and, therefore, if students interact more with the CUPD, their satisfaction will improve. However, to this point, other data provide caution. Specifically, 20% of Black or African American students and 14% of Black, Latinx, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students reported being “very or generally dissatisfied” with the CUPD. In comparison, 6% of Asian students and 12% of white students reported the same (with no distinction made between domestic and international students). Additionally, comments representative of the students who feel dissatisfied highlight a desire for less interaction, not more:

*“Cornell Police disproportionately target students of color and Black students. It’s not a secret that there is a fractured relationship as a result of historical policing of these communities. Assigning specialized workers in fields that do not need police officers will significantly alleviate stress and the distrust between communities of color and the police.”*

Or:

*“They never properly disperse large social gatherings whenever the gatherings consist of primarily white students. CUPD consistently racially profiles Black students, including myself. There is no legitimate reason for them to be armed other than to intimidate black and brown students.”*

The focus group conversation with CUPD officers seems to support these students’ points of view, as the officers who participated expressed disregard for the experiences and views of students of color.

To this end, the PSAC recommends a three-pronged approach to this recommendation, which shall apply to the CUPD and all public safety responders, when appropriate at Cornell: recruitment, training, and deployment.

#### **4.A: Recruitment**

- **The PSAC recommends** the university dedicate substantial resources to a national recruitment campaign to hire officers, responders, and dispatchers from diverse backgrounds.

- The PSAC endorses the current preference for applicants with no prior law enforcement experience.
- The PSAC endorses the current preference for all applicants to have a college degree or equivalent experience, so long as this preference does not become a barrier to increasing diversity.
- **The PSAC recommends** that Cornell public safety worker pay and benefits be reevaluated and, if necessary, enhanced.

#### 4.B: Training

- **The PSAC recommends** a redoubling of university efforts to encourage an understanding and empathetic mindset among all public safety staff, including those with the CUPD, emphasizing that it is responders' responsibility to reach the students as and who they are.
- **The PSAC recommends** the creation of a continuing education curriculum in the liberal arts for all public safety staff, including those with the CUPD, selected from existing Cornell classes. This curriculum should be designed by a faculty committee and/or a working group designated by the university's Center for Antiracist, Just, and Equitable Futures, which will determine prerequisites, duration, and modes of evaluation. This program is not intended to become an undue burden of work for the participants.

#### 4.C: Deployment

- **The PSAC recommends** limiting the visibility and deployment of weapons, body armor, and tactical equipment where practical for all responders.
- **The PSAC recommends** replacing vehicle patrols with foot and/or bike patrols wherever practical.
- **The PSAC recommends** future iterations of this committee should evaluate and recommend improvements to Cornell's public safety oversight, complaint review, and internal investigation policies and structure.

## **Conclusion**

Members of the Public Safety Advisory Committee have met at least twice a month since summer 2020. We have engaged in hard conversations, solicited and collected new information, and learned from one another's diverse points of view. We are recommending changes to the structure of public safety on campus to improve a sense of belonging for all Cornellians and to address issues raised both in our survey and in our focus groups. We invite conversation, constructive criticism, and thoughtful dissent while urging all members of the community to work inclusively to maintain safety on campus for all.

# Appendix

## Alternative Models Bank

### **California**

Community Action Team – San Luis Obispo Police Department  
Mental Evaluation Unit (MEU) – Los Angeles Police Department  
[Mental Health First](#) – Oakland and Sacramento  
Mobile Assistance Community Responders – Oakland  
[Mobile Crisis Unit](#) – San Luis Obispo  
[Therapeutic Transportation Pilot](#) – Los Angeles

### **Colorado**

[Support Team Assisted Response](#) – Denver

### **Florida**

Criminal Mental Health Project – Miami-Dade County

### **Georgia**

Dekalb Crisis Center – Dekalb County, Georgia

### **Maryland**

[Crisis Response Team](#) – Baltimore Police Department  
[STEER Police Deflection](#) – Montgomery County

### **New York**

[Behavioral Health Mobile Crisis Team](#) – Tompkins County  
[Crisis Intervention Team](#) – Broome County  
[Diversionary Response Model](#) – Syracuse  
[Mental Health Teams](#) – New York City  
[Person in Crisis Teams](#) – Rochester

### **Oregon**

CAHOOTS – Eugene  
[Project Respond](#) – Multnomah County

### **Texas**

[Expanded Mobile Crisis Outreach Team](#) - Travis County, Texas

### **Utah**

Mobile Crisis Outreach Team – Salt Lake County, Utah