

MILL VALLEY

City, activists disagree on police stop data meaning



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Data collected under the state Racial and Identity Profiling Act show that Black drivers are stopped at a frequency disproportionate to their population in Mill Valley. The police chief says most of the drivers came from elsewhere.

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Mill Valley social justice activists are at odds with city officials over the implications of new race-based data associated with police stops.

The Mill Valley Force for Racial Equity and Empowerment, an advocacy group known as MVFREE, presented its analysis of the data to the City Council on Oct. 3. The police department provided its own evaluation of the data at the same meeting.

The two groups are at loggerheads about the depth of racism in the city and how it has manifested in police stops dispro-

tionately targeting people of color.

Mill Valley, a city of about 14,100, has a population of about 81.6% White residents, 1% Black residents, 6% Latino residents and 6% Asian residents, according to 2020 census data.

Tammy Edmonson, a member of MVFREE, said the report indicated Black people are stopped at 6.5 times the rate of White people and Latino people are stopped at 3.2 times the rate of White people. City residents call the police about Black people at nearly 20 times the rate they do about White people, she said.

In most of these calls and stops, police find nothing to justify a citation or arrest, she said. The

data, she said, prove Mill Valley has a police racial profiling problem.

"We had really hoped that both the council and chief would respond to the data with a level of alarm," Edmonson said. "There is way more that we can and should do and that the report has suggested for us to do."

The data were accrued between June 1, 2021, and May 31, in accordance with AB 953, the Racial and Identity Profiling Act (RIPA). It requires law enforcement agencies in the state to collect the data and report it to the attorney general by April.

Police Chief Rick Navarro said

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the department acknowledges “significant disparities” in the racial makeup of overall stops when solely using population data from Mill Valley. But the department has noted that the police stop outside visitors in addition to Mill Valley residents.

The data indicate that the people contacted come from many parts of Marin and the greater Bay Area.

Navarro said there were 88 stops of perceived Black people over the period. Because the Department of Justice will not accept residential or personal identifying information on stop data, residency was only retained for those given a written citation or a written warning or who were arrested.

Of the 13 perceived Black people arrested, only one was from Mill Valley. The others were from Marin City, San Rafael, Santa Rosa, San Francisco, Sacramento, Concord, Vallejo, Castro Valley, Novato, Richmond, San Jose and Henderson, Nevada, Navarro said.

Police issued 17 written citations or written warnings to perceived Black people. None was from

Mill Valley, Navarro said. There were three from San Francisco; two from Marin City, San Pablo and San Rafael; and one each for Oakland, Novato, San Leandro, Union City, Corte Madera, Antioch, Santa Rosa and Vallejo.

“With all of this in mind, we still have work to do within our police department and community in order to do our part to help educate on implicit bias,” Navarro said.

Edmonson said she was “disappointed” in the apparent deflection of responsibility among Mill Valley officials. She said there was no evidence there was a disproportionate amount of visitors of other races to prove their assertion.

“I think they’ve latched onto it because they don’t want to acknowledge racial profiling in Mill Valley because they see it as a black mark on the city,” Edmonson said.

Navarro pointed to actions over the last 18 months, such as the early collection and reporting of RIPA data, public engagement events within Mill Valley, and events such as “Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man” in neighboring Marin City.

He said the department has made it easier for people to file complaints online by adding the web ad-

dress to the back of officers’ business cards and making forms available in patrol vehicles, City Hall and the front lobby. The city has expanded recruitment programs into minority communities and adopted anti-bias practices, he said. He noted the department had not received any racial bias officer complaints within the last five years.

“As you know, change does not happen overnight,” he said. “This is only the beginning as we continue to examine the data to help our leadership team improve our service to our community, training of our officers, and recruitment of our staff.”

Naima Dean, a member of MVFREE and a Black resident of Mill Valley, said the ultimate goal of the RIPA data was to “have success and reflect change.”

“It’s a numbers game. You can take them and manipulate them to suit any sort of need. You can work with numbers to explain whatever you’re trying to exemplify,” she said.

“We know the police need to do better. Let’s not work with the data further. Let’s work with the solution,” she said.

Dean said Mill Valley has a history steeped in racism that has been long ignored. She said compromises and solutions need to be re-

ceived by the city and put into action as soon as possible.

“If we can all come to the table and focus on the inherent goodness that’s in all humans, we might be able to get somewhere,” she said. “We’ve been working on the city over two years and we’re still squabbling over some data. Let’s fix the issues. Let’s get past the data and actually implement action. There’s no plan.”

Mayor Jim Wickham said the meeting promoted a beneficial conversation about the impact of policing on minority communities.

“Every day it gets better. I think about how we interpret the data, how we train officers and how we work with the community,” he said. “I appreciate the fact that there’s good dialogue.”

The first run of stop information was collected between June 1 and Aug. 31, 2021.

Out of 457 stops, 341 involved White people (74.6%); 64, Hispanic/Latino (14%); 17, Asian (3.7%); 17, Black/African-American (3.7%); 11, Middle Eastern or South Asian (2.4%); and less than a percentage point of Pacific Islander, Native American and multiple races.

Mill Valley’s 22-officer police department has an annual budget of about \$7.1 million.