Connecticut a National Model For Reducing Racial Disparity in Police Traffic Stops

MIDDLETOWN – Connecticut's long-term initiative to reduce racial disparities in traffic stops by police stands out as a national model, according to new research from Northeastern University.

The Northeastern study reveals that Connecticut's program, which began in 2011 with the launch of the Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project, has successfully reduced racial disparities in traffic stops across the state. Over the last decade, the "Connecticut Model" has emerged as an example for municipalities and law enforcement.

"The influence of the Connecticut program has reached far beyond the state's borders and has had a national impact on the conversation about police reform," the study concludes. "This program has been in place for more than a decade and has been a model for other states and localities as they have been developing their own programs."

"We find substantial reductions in stops of African-American and Hispanic motorists on the order of 30% of the mean number of stops," the report states.

The racial profiling prohibition project produces annual racial profiling reports that identify departments that may have significant disparities. Follow up intervention, emphasizing voluntary communication between program staff and police, uses traffic data patterns to help departments rethink enforcement strategies. For example, after 29 Connecticut police departments were identified to have racial disparities in traffics stop patterns, there was a 24 percent decrease in Black and Hispanic drivers involved in traffic stops over 12 months.

"Our hope is to hold up Connecticut as a model and say you can actually do this," said Matthew Ross, associate professor of public policy and economics at Northeastern. "What's happened in Connecticut is they have really built a soup-to-nuts framework for addressing these problems in a thoughtful way that gives everyone a seat at the table."

Ross said what's different in Connecticut is a commitment to examine the data and then collaboratively discuss pathways to reform and improved enforcement tactics.

With more than 21 million motorists stopped annually by law enforcement, public concern over racial disparities and traffic enforcement has grown. Paying attention to the data says is essential, said DESPP Commissioner Ronnell A. Higgins.

"The accuracy of information collected or maintained by Connecticut law enforcement is foundational in maintaining trust and legitimacy in law enforcement in our state, and one of my top priorities," Higgins said.

"Making sure all traffic stops are safe, fair, and properly documented remains a top priority for the Connecticut State Police," Higgins said. "We look forward to our continued and stronger collaboration with the Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project."

In recent months, the Connecticut State Police have improved and expanded records training for troopers, expanded supervision and review of racial profiling data and records submitted by troopers, and made compulsory use of e-ticket technology, among other improvements.

"This study confirms that you can address complex problems by collaborating and using data to guide the discussion. Although our work is incomplete, the study highlights that we have been on the right track thanks to the dedication of all those involved," said Ken Barone, associate director of the University of Connecticut's Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy, which oversees the racial profiling project.

"The goal of this project has always been to increase trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve," Barone said.

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