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WEBINAR

EXAMINING POLICE REFORM IN BALTIMORE AND ST. LOIUS

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

JENNIFER D. ROBERTS
Associate Professor, School of Public Health, University of Maryland College Park
Founder and Director, Public Health Outcomes and Effects of the Built Environment

ALYASAH ALI SEWELL
Associate Professor & Winship Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology,
Emory University

YANET AMANUEL
Public Policy Director, ACLU of Maryland

PERRI JOHNSON
Dean of Students and Admissions, Loyola Academy of St. Louis
Retired Police Captain, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department

MODERATOR: RASHAWN RAY
Senior Fellow, Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative (RPII), The Brookings Institution

MODERATOR: KEON L. GILBERT
Fellow, Governance Studies, The Brookings Institution

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RAY: Hello. I'm Dr. Rashawn Ray, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. Welcome to our webinar on a discussion about police reform in St Louis in Baltimore. What I want to do is tell you how we got here and talk about some of the work that we've done. Before we get to our distinguished panel first, if you haven't seen, we have a new piece about how police violence reshapes community health and trust. I'll be sharing some information from that, as well as a state level database measuring police reform that we think really sets the tone for the way that in many ways, police reform is focused very locally in cities like St Louis and Baltimore and then at the federal level, through legislation that is aimed to be passed, such as the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act.

Missing is what's happening at the state level in the middle and the way the states might actually help with police reform and in other ways might actually hinder it. We know that one of the reasons why we're here is we can look on the left at Michael Brown, who was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb right outside of St Louis. And on the right, Freddie Gray, who ended up being killed following transport by police in 2015 in Baltimore. One thing that we know that research documents that over 1000 people are killed by police each year. That is a person every eight hours. However, there are huge variations across states, and these variations can range in huge ways. When we talk about legislation, the big thing to note is that passing police legislation in states can range anywhere from as low as 2% to upwards of 80%. And police reform is not only focused on reform meant to provide police accountability, but also protections that actually give police more immunity.

When we look across the United States, we can see the wide range in terms of the rate at which people are killed by law enforcement, ranging from very low to upwards of about 11. The darker the blue suggests, the higher the rate of police killings in those states. So you can see that there's huge variation across the United States in terms of what this looks like when we look specifically at Maryland, where Baltimore is located at. And Missouri, where Saint Louis is located at we also see huge variations. The first big thing I want to note, though, is that the size of Maryland, Missouri, despite Missouri being larger geographically, it is it has a very similar number of people who are in each state, over 6 million. But the Black population in Maryland is shown here at the bottom of this slide. It's significantly higher than it is in the state of Missouri. The rate at which people are killed in Maryland is about 180 people over the past ten years. Compare to Missouri, where we see that 310

people have been killed over that ten-year span nearly doubled. So we can see that the rate at which people are killed is much higher in Missouri than it is in Maryland. And when we look at incidents such as what happened with Michael Brown and what happened with Freddie Gray, both cases, they became extremely public and helped to catalyze the Black Lives Matter movement. We can even see variations within these states.

One of the other things that my colleague Robin Moore and I looked at was specific legislation that focused on reform and then police protections. When we talk about reforms, we were looking at legislation that talked about new training, providing oversight, banning certain tactics that we know that increase violence, and then also implementing technology to increase transparency. When we focused on protective measures, we looked at appropriations for new grant programs, which, you know, through the COPS program federally has increased federal spending on law enforcement over 350% since 1980. We looked at proposals and protected measures that limited oversight capabilities such as oversight boards that limited liability. In other words, that actually bolstered qualified immunity to allow for law enforcement to not have the same potential liability for harming someone and then also might have imposed harsher penalties for criminals against the police. But also other things that we know there's really important, such as providing resources for law enforcement, whether they be around mental health or housing and even pay.

When we look across the United States, what we actually see is huge variations in a percentage of reforms being enacted. In other words, of the proposals that were brought forth, that dealt with policing and law enforcement, how successful was the state legislature in passing those reforms? Well, let me give you a couple of comparisons. Let's go to New York, which is a state, because of the size of the population, gets a lot of attention, although a lot of proposals were presented and people might hear policymakers talking about this in the news and thinking about their reelection efforts. And in many ways, I do think really trying to do to go work in their communities. Less than 2% of all legislation proposed in the state of New Jersey, in the state of New York, dealing with policing was actually passed comparatively. Let's go to Colorado. That is in many ways been a pinnacle for what collaboration across the aisle and police reform looks like. Colorado has passed nearly 80% of all legislation that is came up as it relates to policing. And we also see huge variations in Maryland, in

Missouri. In Maryland, they passed over the past, say, five years, about 34 pieces of legislation, nearly 15%. That's almost one out of six. Well, one important thing to note about Maryland is that Maryland oftentimes has a package of bills. And in the state of Maryland, following Freddie Gray and other incidents, pass the Maryland Police Accountability Act, which is the most transformative and progressive form of police reform, dealing with community oversight boards, banning qualified immunity, dealing with use of force and other aspects that went into that bill. So even though we see that percentage being there, the impact of just that particular legislation in and of itself is significant. If we started to break down that particular legislation, Missouri, on the other hand, has not had the same level of passing legislation as it relates to policing. Less than 2%, very similar to New York, but different from New York, where there are a lot of legislators actually proposing legislation on policing in the state of Missouri. We're not seeing that at all when it comes to protective measures. We see that Maryland about a third of the time, much fewer bills for police. But still legislation that deals with mental health and housing and other sorts of things. Missouri, on the other hand, this is pretty much what their police reform is look like at the state level is enacting pro-police protections to prevent officers from facing prosecution and civil liability.

And one big thing that we found in our work is how much this relates to the stability of the state of the state legislation. And you can see this variation in the redder means that Republicans are more likely to control their state legislator. And the blue suggests that Democrats have been more likely to control the state legislature. And then we can kind of look in the middle states like Michigan, Virginia, even Alaska, where it's kind of going back and forth. But overwhelmingly, there's been a lot of stability in state legislatures. In Maryland is swings far to the left being controlled by Democrats pretty much every single time over the past ten years. Comparatively, Missouri swinging far to the right, being controlled by Republicans. So we can think about the juxtaposition in how this is played out.

One of the things that we wanted to do, Keon Gilbert, Ali Sewell, Jennifer Roberts, and myself, is to take a deep dive into what's happening in St Louis in Baltimore. We conducted 20 stakeholder interviews deeply in these communities with individuals who could offer various perspectives with elected officials, police officers, community activists and advocates, all offering valuable perspectives. What I’m going to share is two parts of what they shared with us. The first deals with community

health. Leaders in both cities define community health holistically, as in company access to resources, autonomy and equity across various institutions. These are some of the quotes that came up. I would define community is whether or not people are able to have control over things around them, live comfortably. Infrastructure, talking about everything from grocery stores to hospitals, talk to schools and everything in between. Respondents also stressed the engagement of law enforcement, then working with community leaders and working with individuals in the community instead of being perceived as working against the community. Accordingly, they talked about the negative impacts of mental health and the impact that that has on local communities. In Saint Louis, similarly. Our experts talked about resources, housing, health care, families, transportation, healthy food. They viewed healthy communities as being everything under the sun and law enforcement and public safety being a part of that. But they also elevated big disparities that played out in these communities. And the way that community health is poor in Saint Louis, in terms of the way that people interact together in terms of the resources that they have.

And as the last person said, community health to me is equity. Everybody is able to receive the services that they need and they are able to have access to whatever services that they need. When it comes to the impact of policing on community health. Leaders in both cities talked about it being a strained relationship. And accordingly, they talked about how it could be a struggle, how can become a struggle again psychologically and emotionally to see the efforts that they're doing actually not necessarily change what's going on. And they also talked about how many people have been harassed, brutalized, falsely charged, not only in Baltimore, but in Saint Louis. And so as we think about what happened to Michael Brown and we think about what happened to Freddie Gray, we can see similarities across these two cities. But the way that the states have responded have led to drastic differences. And now I want to welcome my colleague, Dr. Keon Gilbert, who is a fellow in the governance studies program at the Brookings Institution and also a professor at Saint Louis University. Welcome, Keon.

GILBERT: Great. Thank you, Rashawn, and thank you so much for providing that overview of the project and helping to explain some of the broader context of police reform in legislation in Maryland, Missouri, and specifically looking at St Louis and Baltimore. I'd like to also welcome our panelists and

thank them in advance for participating in this panel. So if you all can join us and come on screen. Great. Thank you. And again, Rashawn, we want to thank you for providing that overview. I'm going to now introduce our panelist for examining police reform in Baltimore and St Louis. We have with us Jennifer Roberts, Associate Professor in the School of Public Health at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is also the founder and director of Public Health Outcomes and Effects of the Built Environment. Thank you, Jennifer. We also have with us Yanet Amanuel, who is the public policy director for ACLU of Maryland. We have with us also Perri Johnson, dean of Students in Admissions at Loyola Academy in Saint Louis. He's also a retired police captain in from the Saint Louis Metropolitan Police Department. We also have with us Alysah Ali Sewell, who is a professor of sociology at Emory University. Great. Thank you so much for joining us. So I'm going to jump right into it and lead into our first question. So this this question is for Professor Sewell. If you could think about writing just a quick reflection of some of the data that Rashawn shared. If you can think about some of the links between the state level data and thinking about community safety narratives that we've heard from participants and how the DOJ consent decrees in St Louis and Baltimore factor into this analysis.

SEWELL: Keon, this is a great question. I'm going to have to, unfortunately or fortunately flip your questions, because I think the question around DOJ actually is going to form a lot of our understandings of how our data can actually be used to think on how the consent decrees in St Louis and Baltimore and the ways in which we're acting on them could be a larger plan to enact or to follow for other local areas.

So the quick answer, perhaps a little more, but the quick answer is that, you know, the prospective U.S. Attorney General at this moment, Pam Bondi, does not appear to share the conservative sentiment that the previous Trump administration, in things like Project 2025, acted upon regarding consent decrees in 2017 to 2021 or so. Specifically, Attorney General Jeff Sessions sought to limit the oversight of federal district judges in enforcing consent decrees. However, Bondi's tenure as federal AG have been occupied more with questions about health care and housing policies. I do not expect there to be any new consent decrees, regardless of how many things happen. We understand that

many of our consent decrees, including in Baltimore and Ferguson, are actually a product of events that happened, heinous issues that have happened.

But I would, I would, I would say something positive here. Federal distractions on the issue, whether it be reproductive rights or housing and so on, so forth, actually give us an opportunity to make substantial and significant advancements in police reform at the state and local levels. And I think that's what the consent decrees are that we're looking at in Ferguson in particular and in and in and in Baltimore, in a sense that the federal judges in those states have upheld the fact that these police departments need to continue on these efforts regardless of how difficult that has become. What we want to think about is that the rollbacks that we're seeing has put us in a place where the state ballot, the state ballot wins that we actually saw in the last presidential election can actually be showing us a room for change. The power has always been with the people and our voting electorate actually showed us that on November the 5th. The power is actually not with the people in power, not in this case. The Administrative Executive Office may not be trustworthy or reliable, and the pressure the everyday people can place on the state, local and legislative politics promise more fruitful avenues for police reform.

I believe - probably like a lot of civil rights advocates - that we have lost the Supreme Court. In that light, our state-level data can actually play a key role in making the clear legislative victories that we have had and how those victories have clustered with other winds and other social conditions. The data, I believe, can also provide a single platform to identify the logics or where to look for the logics that have all been less effective. However, we must be efficient in crafting our narratives. I think this is even more important with the state and local areas because it is this these the officials can change very quickly. Our interviews with community stakeholders offer us some room for this fodder as well. Even in the question of defining community health there are clear differences in how police view the pathway to public safety and the broader stakeholders do as well. So we interview these political advocates. We interviewed parents of youth who had been killed. We interviewed mayors and municipal officials, and they gave us a wide array of narratives that we can pull from. It's going to be up to us as individuals, as the people to press on in that in that in that endeavor. That’s the shortest and best answer that I can give you, Keon.

GILBERT: Great. We appreciate that. We're going to certainly come back to some of these other issues you've raised in terms of thinking about both politics and policy, as well as thinking about community engagement and their connections to policymakers in terms of their role in ensuring reform in police reform. I'm going to quickly turn to Captain Johnson and to offer some reflections on the project itself and thinking about how reform in these two cities have met some resistance and some and some barriers. Some examples can be from organizations such as the Fraternal Order of Police. So thinking about some of your own experiences with folks who haven't been fully supportive of police reform.

JOHNSON: A great, great question. Great answer. What you have to realize about police reform is you got to really look at who had benefits. And some people aren't in favor of police reform because it doesn't benefit them. Some people, unfortunately, when you when you have when you don't have enough policies in place to really thin the herd on getting the right people to do something as crucial as police work, you get people in there that all they want to do is lock people up and think that that's the solution. Well, they think that's a solution because then they go home and they're not around those folks. You know, they go back home to their different worlds.

And so oftentimes you get people that are resistant to communicating with the community because one of the first things with community partnerships is communicating with that community and gaining their trust. If you able to gain the community's trust, then there's a lot of things you can do because, number one, you can start to find out what the needs in the communities are and you have the community that's going to assist you in helping with these things.

So projects like these are crucial, but also what's more crucial is that relationship that that police department develops with the community that they police. And I say that very carefully because a lot of times in our Black communities we're policed, but in non-Black communities you're patrolled and there is a big difference. So it makes a difference who you're dealing with and how deep they are in with their police associations and therefore people who they don't want to oftentimes go against. And it creates a lot of different dynamics. And I have to believe that today police policemen are truly

divided in a conundrum, because you have the leader of the free world who wants to turn police into something that they aren't meant to be. And trust me, within those ranks, there are some people that want to do that.

But then you going to have those that say, no, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to go out here and just hunt people and do things like that that aren't right. That's not what I signed up for. So you're going to have you're going to have splits and there is going to be it's going to come down to what does that administration want to have happen? What type of relationship does the administration have with the city that they're there within, and how far are they willing to go to support the right things that the citizens want to have? But it has to start with working together. I've always been a proponent. If you're going to do train and bring citizens in and show them what training you're doing so they can understand it so that when they see your officers do something on the street to say, Hey, I understand why he's doing that, they trained us about that. I know what's going on there. You have to be in a mindset of building allies and not enemies.

GILBERT: Thank you so much. I just want to maybe quickly follow up. One of the things that you talked about was sort of discord and divisions within police agencies themselves. Maybe if you could speak to some of the things that you've seen in terms of ways that some either agencies or specific officers may have been or are working towards trying to build a greater unity within police agencies?

JOHNSON: Gotcha. You know, within police agencies, you have a number of different people. You have the person who generally wants to do the job and they want to do the job right. And they come in with the mindset of helping to save the community that they serve. We've got some people who just want to come in and abuse the power that they were given. And that that causes conflict. As young officers come in. It's crucial who you put them with to help shape what type of police officer that they become. Because if you don't do that, then you create a conflict because within the ranks of the police department, they always say, hey, we're all blue, we're all, yeah, that's cool, but we're all blue until something happens. And then there's light skinned blue and there's dark skinned blue and there's a difference in how they're treated. And the unfortunate thing is you have to figure out which side of the ball game you're going to be a part of or you're going to be a part that does things right and treats

people correctly. Are you going to go along with some of the status quo who say, hey, we're the police officers with a strong arm of the law and we're going to do what we have to do to go home? And that's kind of always model we're going to do we got to do to go home no matter what happens with that. Where are you morally? Where are you going to fall? And that's something that you have to determine. And how stronger and stronger are you to stand up against that? Because what a lot of police officers worry about Well, if I go against the status quo, then when I need help, they're not going to come help me. Not realizing that, hey, you know what? There are some other folks, I think like you. And if you all are working together, then you can't survive.

I was I was blessed enough to have a couple of great partners that that, as the kids say nowadays, stood on business. They were about their rights. They were about the rights of our people that look like us. And then they let people know that they call people out on this stuff. And you could you never doubted where they stood when it came to community, what we call community policing, police reform, all those types of things.

There are a number of different things right now that can be done in police form and police and police reform statewide, citywide, across this nation that haven't been done. There are things you can implement that join police departments and communities together that haven't been done. One of them was a program we called Cops in Coalition, basically putting social workers into cars and police cars to handle certain calls because they become a social problem before they're a criminal problem. So you can add that that problem, why you're still socially, you minimize the resources that you have to do that. And when you minimize those resources, you create additional time for your officers to have time to get out there and walk up and down a block and get to know each other, get to know people in those neighborhoods instead of just driving by and not paying attention. So sometimes you have to put things in place to force the issue.

GILBERT: Great. Thank you so much for sharing that. Speaking on standing on business, I'm going to turn to Yanet. And we know that the ACLU has a large portfolio and working on different forms of legislation and policy reform. And we know that you're working hard in Maryland. If you could maybe spend a little bit of time discussing some of the strategies that you've been involved in with ACLU

working on police reform and local and state levels. Maybe you can highlight some successes, setbacks and even barriers to resist barriers and resistance you've experienced also.

AMANUEL: Thank you so much. I'll try to be brief because there's a lot to talk about. But at the ACLU, Maryland, we were at the forefront of working on the police reform legislation that passed in 2021. I think it wasn't hard to kind of organized groups into working on these issues because a lot of these issues were stuff that people were working on prior to 2021. So even prior to Freddie Gray, a lot of the family members that I worked with had loved ones killed from the 90s and 80s and so on and have been actively involved in efforts to try to do things like repeal the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights, which was first enacted here in Maryland in 1974. And I think what we did differently and that was successful is really center our campaign in our organizing efforts around the community and in particular, people who have been directly impacted by police violence. We were able to organize a coalition of more than 100 different organizations and individuals, faith leaders, directly impacted individuals. But at the center of the decision making were the families that were impacted by police violence. A number of them we met through our intake line or working, you know, during work in the in the community. And that was really key because they helped develop our messaging, our strategy and also just what we were focusing on.

So we had five demands in 2021, and that was to repeal the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights, reform Maryland's Public Information Act, to allow public disclosure of police misconduct records, finally establish a statewide use of force statute, because up until then, Maryland was only one of nine states that didn't have one, as well as return local control of Baltimore City Police Department back to the city and remove police officers out of schools. And we successfully passed four out of five. We're in the implementation phase of all of that.

But one of the things that we emphasized that was critical is that, you know, we, like was mentioned earlier, had 180 people die from 2010 to 2023, I believe. And we work directly with those family members. And we didn't want just watered-down legislation or something just as simple as training. We wanted to transform policing by transferring the power into the hands of the community and that look like, can you control the police disciplinary process? That was that was the floor. Like anything

less than that was unacceptable. And as well as allowing transparency into police misconduct records, there was a lot of resistance, as you can imagine. But we combated that with having a really robust campaign of community members involved in the process.

I think it helped work to our benefit a little bit at that legislative session was during the height of the pandemic. So a lot of people were at home and the legislature was virtual. So it allowed more access for individuals to participate in the legislative process like we haven't seen before. We had family members on hearing calls up until midnight and they you know, they stayed on the call, too, because we thought that this was important. There was door-knocking efforts. There was really a lot of education that was done with the legislators and really humanizing the issue for them by having them directly speak with those folks who've been directly impacted and humanizing, this is what happens when you have a law enforcement officers bill of rights and it impedes policemen, police officers who conduct misconduct, for being held accountable. And it creates a situation where some legislators felt like if they didn't support this legislation, they would lose their seats. That was really the only way that we could combat all of the organizing that the Fraternal Order of Police was doing was by really making this a people-centered campaign. And I think that is why we got the results that we did. Right now, we're in the implementation phase of that. Still a lot of resistance, especially from the Fraternal Order of Police.

So through the repeal of Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights, we established police accountability boards in each county, including Baltimore City. However, none of them have independent investigative subpoena powers. And so that's currently something that we're advocating for. We did establish a statewide use of force statute, like I mentioned, which really raised the legal standard from objectively reasonable under federal law to now authorize police officers to only use force when necessary and proportional based on the totality of circumstances. And we passed the Maine Public Information Act. But again, implementation is really key to seeing if any of this is actually going to be successful. So we're still monitoring. We're currently actively in litigation in the Montgomery County in Maryland because the FOP there is trying to block efforts to access to misconduct records. So the. The work did not end when those bills passed. It's ongoing. And again, none of this could have been done without working directly with the community.

GILBERT: Thank you so much. One of the things that both you and Captain Johnson have talked about is really building relationships. And you sort of outlined a really robust campaign to working with communities, making it as, in your words, a people centered campaign. If you can maybe just offer a few sort of lessons learned about building trust with community, especially around police reform, I think that could be really helpful for some of us, for some of those in the audience.

AMANUEL: Yeah, I think one of the key things is that, you know, the people working with them look like them. I'm a Black woman from working class backgrounds, so there's just a way that I can connect with some of them in ways that maybe white colleagues cannot. I think that was key to helping build some of that trust. And then it's also just been consistent over the years. A number of these folks have been working with us for over a decade on some of these issues. They didn't get as much limelight until 2021 in the height of the resistance. But there was consistency there. And even though we couldn't help them and support them through litigation, policy is a way that we could engage them in the process.

And the other important part about building trust is having them involved in that process. It wasn't a transactional relationship, but they weren't just there for pictures. They are in our steering committees. I did not negotiate on legislation without consulting with them. They're in the rooms with us when we're having meetings with leadership and the legislator. So they were intimately involved in the process and we spent a lot of time talking about what should we prioritize and really making sure that they understood what the legislation said so that when negotiations came up, they were actively involved in those conversations. So it wasn't a transaction relationship, but a meaningful one. And I think that was key to building their trust and maintaining that trust.

GILBERT: Thank you so much. Because that is so, so important and so key in terms of not just thinking about surface level interactions and engagement, but really thinking about sort of that deep meaning that comes with building trust. Before we run out of too much time and turn to questions from the audience, I want to bring in Jennifer Roberts into the conversation. Jennifer, if you could talk to us

a little bit about the role of policing and on the mitigation of community safety, physical activity and community gauging it from a public health perspective.

ROBERTS: Yeah, sure. Yeah. It's so great to be here with the other panelists. Thank you again for having me. I think I wanted to put one point first in the sense that in 2016, not even ten years ago, it was first declared, the statement was made that racism is a public health crisis that was first declared at the American, American Public Health Association meeting, and it was declared by the president at that time, Dr. Camara Jones. And she had launched this national campaign. And it's interesting because it really didn't start to get some feet or some traction until the summer of 2020 with the whole racial reckoning and everything with George Floyd and how it then became to the point where now there's over like 300 declarations from different government agencies, different associations in terms of them committing to this idea that racism is a public health crisis. And I wanted to start with that because of the fact that it's hard sometimes for people to understand the connection.

But when we think about a situation where it's not optimal in terms of the relationship of the community safety and policing, I like to think of it in terms of three aspects of how it could be optimal, where it can the police can, you know, help and enhance community safety, such as having a nice, healthy, visible presence, you know, to help deter crime or even just collaborations where, you know, you see the police who are often there during like runs or physical activity events, who can help, you know, help keep order and just help, you know, those who assist with community events where there is physical activity. And then along with those types of things, it just kind of helps build a trust with the community. And you have this kind of nice collaboration between the community and the police. But when those things go awry and when you don't have that kind of those connections, it can, you can have a climate of fear and distrust within the community, which actually can discourage people from actually going outside to engage in outdoor activities.

I've done research where I talk about, you know, walking while Black, biking while Black, running while Black, all these things where, you know, folks may feel a heightened sense of being profiled or a heightened sense of being targeted, I should say, or even harassed by law enforcement, which can actually lead to more sedentary lifestyles. And so when you look at it in that sense, you can definitely

see the public health connection, not only from a physical aspect in terms of not getting that physical activity, but with physical activity there's also, you know, mental health benefits because you're outside, you're engaging with people. Even with the natural levels of, you know, the adrenaline and all of these other – I won't get into all the bio, or not the bio, the the the physiological aspects of it – but there's the mental health benefits of physical activity. And then also to just the reduction of stress and anxiety whenever you are engaging in. So when you don't have those outlets or when you feel like your spaces where you could engage in physical activity, are not want, are not places where you can feel safe and not targeted, you're not going to engage in those types of activities. Which can lead to downstream public health adverse outcomes, you know, in terms of excess weight, cardiovascular disease, a myriad of other aspects. And so the but the other thing, too, I also want to point out, too, is like kind of going back to some of the things before in terms of when you have these outdoor physical activity events, but you don't have that, you can lead to social isolation and just other aspects. And so this is like this myriad of things that can all work together. And when people don't have that, it can create just a very unhealthy community on a social, mental and physical health level.

GILBERT: Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing. So, you know, you've talked about health having in many ways sort of this dual impact on thinking about at least at least two ways of community safety and public health, one on communities themselves and two on the officers. And so both being physical and mental. Maybe if you could share a few sort of narratives about why that becomes really important in terms of moving forward with police reform legislation.

ROBERTS: Well, it becomes important because I believe I believe the healthiest community is an active community and active communities also engage with each other. And when you have these fractions or you have these parts where you have some communities that can have the opportunity to be helping others, you just kind of create this increasing gaps or these increasing gaps and health disparities. And so it's really important to have this kind of like concerted effort between law enforcement and the community to be able to actually have a healthy community and so that people do go outside.

And actually, when I also say go outside, it's not even just so much of recreation activity because lots of people think of physical activity. It's like, I'm going to the park, I'm going to do this exercise. Yes, I'm talking about that. But I'm also talking about the every day-to-day thing, and talking about the Trayvon Martin, just walking to the corner store, I'm talking about just everyone who just wants to go and take out take a bike to get to a place to do something. And you don't want to get stopped because you're just, you know, you're biking to get from A to B, so those levels of just like kind of like active transit or active living, just doing everyday things in life that are not nicely recreational activity. And so when you don't have that or you don't have an environment that can help facilitate that or help encourage that, then you will have an environment where people are less likely to achieve those optimum physical and mental and well, social levels of health.

GILBERT: Yeah, I mean, and that really speaks to sort of these dueling narratives that come from these different disciplines, different areas. We in public health, we want to encourage people to be outside, to be physically active in lots of different ways. And then you have this negative narrative where you're walking while Black, driving while Black, or engaging in physical activity while Black, and you in and you have these negative encounters with police. And maybe we could ask Captain Johnson to speak to a little bit to that, to the to the juxtaposition. And so thinking about on one hand, there is crime that happens and there is that police brutality, police violence that happens and how difficult that is to sort of manage, manage those two things and thinking about how it affects, affects community health. Maybe we could speak to some of your, some examples into your ability to work with communities to try to get some of those things.

JOHNSON: First and foremost, police brutality is a crime. And you know that that's the reality of it. And it's not hard when you understand the dynamics of police work. And something that I was mentioning earlier, use of force continuum, they have rules that dictate the amount of force that you use to go into it, not wanting to use any force at all. And you only elevate when that other person objects. You stop when that other person stops. Has some of these things been happening? We wouldn't have as many Black males that have been killed, that have been killed. And it's a shame when, you know, you pull up on a Black male, you think he's an adult, within three seconds, you killed him when all you had to do was talk to him. It's always it boils down to time and space, because when

you think about what the use of force means, the bottom level of use of force, communication at the top, of course, is deadly force. And one of the things that can help you handle any type of situation is time and space. If you create space, that gives you more time. So obviously, a lot of these officers did never did that. They rushed up on a situation and overreacted.

So when you start to go along the lines of what combats that, you know, when you have stuff like your citizens' academies, things that working with other people's - excuse me, one second. All right. Thank you. Your citizens' academy, going out into the public, creating things, your PAL leagues, getting officers involved in the community and understanding what the community needs are. Sometimes you have to go in that community and talk to people. One of the worst things that happened to police department is when they got cars. Why? Because it put a barrier between them and the community. And so I challenge police departments all the time: Hey, take your new officers and send them out onto the street 2 to 3 weeks before they graduate the police academy. Tell them to go out there, meet people, so when they get out there, the people already know they are. But we as society, we sometimes put so much fear in them, and you have officers that want to make connections but are never given the opportunity to make connections. They they get surrounded overwhelmingly with officers that don't want to make those connections, so then they get, they they're inundated with that negative and it pushes them to a different light.

When I was a commander, one of the most violent districts in the city of St Louis, I took those officers that wanted to be community-oriented and we created a unit for just that. That's all they did. They went out, they knocked door to door. They met people. They went to events. That's what they did. You were never going to tell my district that we didn't see the police and that they didn't talk to us because I would always go to community meetings and I would challenge the community. My officers are going to speak to you because that's how I've trained them. If they don't speak to you, you let me know. But at the same time, if they come back to me and they say, you didn't speak, then we're going to have a conversation about it because we both want to build relationships. And it's not a one-way street. It has to be a two-way street.

And the second part of that and things that I did, you have to get beyond what just constitutes police work because people have all kinds of problems, things going on. Prime example, I had a lady who had an overgrown tree in her front yard. She was scared to death it was going to fall on her house, but nobody had helped her with that. So what we started doing, we had we started having meetings with our community, with our community partners and our city agencies, forestry, all those, the trash pick up, the people who clean up in the alleys. We started having meetings with them, so we would go to those meetings, say, I got Ms. Jones over here, she's at this address and we would take pictures. Here's what she has. I need some help with that. And so they would go out and they would cut that tree down or they would patch the street in front of her house and they would do those types of things. And now we build an ally, because the next time I go to a meeting with Ms. Jones, she's like, Hey, you know what? The police department took care of me. Not that we harmed her. Not that we made her feel any kind of way, but we took care of her. It was something that we had time to do because if the community is working with you, that makes your job that much easier.

So that's. And here in closing, we would do a thing. Every city you drive to, you see derelict vehicles parked. Well, we would have a day where we did nothing but tow vehicles. That's all we would do is tow vehicles. And when we did that, they appreciated it. We'd go out, we tow 25, 30 vehicles on every other Tuesday. Well, that starts to add up. And people don't have to look out and see that. It's the broken windows syndrome, right? People don’t have to look out and see those types of things.
So when they do that, they start to feel better about themselves and their neighborhood. When they start to feel better about themselves and their neighborhood, then they're more apt to communicate with the police, work with us, and vice versa. Sorry for the interruption, you all. One of my students.

GILBERT: It's okay. It's okay. That's okay. It's all right. I mean, in many ways, you really describe a couple of different strategies and opportunities to not only think about, you know, yes, lots of communities have lots of issues and challenges, but also thinking about the assets and thinking about even the aesthetics of communities and in part, building this coalition with communities in partnerships with with police of caring, concern and compassion. And that really sort of shapes or reshapes that narrative of what public safety looks like and even sort of ways that officers can

positively impact community health. So thank you so much for sharing those examples. Go ahead. You want to add --

JOHNSON: One last thing. And it is interesting, when I left the police department in '20 when COVID hit and my own police department kind of turned on me. I left and I lived in a in a county of St Louis that had a community and the police department there, the citizens set up a protest outside the police department, and they painted Black Lives Matter on a major roadway in St. Louis County. Black Lives Matter. Now, for me, my mentality was that's an opportunity. Put my officers out there and say, cool, no problem. We're going to support you on this. Everything's good. But no, that police department came out there and spray painted over it. So now tell me what you think that did to the relationship.

GILBERT: Yeah, really significantly changes the direction of that many different ways. I want to bring in Alysah Sewell back into the conversation. A lot of your work is focused on the importance of the relationship between hyper surveillance and illness spillovers, what you frame as illness spillovers. If you could help define that and help us to think through how police reform can be part of harm reduction to reduce risk for chronic conditions.

SEWELL: So thank you for bringing, there, there are so many conversations that came to my mind as Yanet, as Perri talking to people. But I appreciate you coming in and telling these stories of how you are on the ground with people.

So I'll give you the shortest way I can do this. So I start with the conversation of hyper surveillance. Hyper surveillance for me means three things. It is excessive stops. It is aggressive stops. So we're going to, I stopped you, I'm patting you down, I'm and I'm using weapons against you. That's a little bit more than that. And you mentioned this, but lethal. So I want to talk about how little it takes to affect a spillover. So spillover means, how I test it, is not if you have contact with the police, but if you live in a neighborhood or community area. In Philadelphia, I use census tracts and zip codes, in New York City, we use, you know, UnitedHealth Funds, which are community health service districts. In both those areas, which are under consent decree -- and New York has been there for decades, okay, Philadelphia since 2011 -- in those areas, you see higher in, where if you live in a community where

there is additional block, not ten blocks, if you're going to if you go out to the store, Jennifer, you're ten blocks away. I just need one block where there is a stop and frisk. I need one block out of ten. I need three blocks out of ten for use of force. One block out of ten for frisking. You have higher levels of diabetes, higher levels of asthma episodes, higher levels of high blood pressure, more obesity. And people believe that this is not a good thing for my health. My health is bad. You have a situation where people are more likely to say they feel nervous, they feel worthless. They feel like every day I get out there and I can't get it done.

You see, there are gender differences in this question. Men in particular are more likely to say a Black guy, a Black boy going to school the next day, he's experienced a no-knock warrant. He gets up there the next day and he's going through the metal detector and he stops. And when he stops, when he goes to class, he's not thinking about math. He's thinking about, I don't know if this is going to be a good for me. And we treat him like that. Women, in fact, we know from our study, Keon, Rashawn Rashawn, if you live in – listen, this is how little this is: one out of three years where there is a lethal lethality, this is where we call it lethal surveillance. This is when a, not a not a journalist, but a doctor says, without contact from the police, no doubt about it, they would not have died. Okay. So these are called legal intervention deaths. I don't need someone to die every year. I don't need it. I don't need every block, I need one time out of three years in the in the ten years. Prior to the fall of stop questioning and frisk, 2014, in New York City, there were 77 stops that would classify as too many. In those areas, yes, there was higher levels of obesity for all the people. There were higher levels of obesity for women. But the gender difference in those neighborhoods, it was women who had a higher risk of a, they call it a CVD risk, right? You have higher levels obesity, diabetes, hypertension. Not men. These are the people who were left behind. This is what we call incarceral grief.

Last one I'll get to you. In an area -- we would assume that policing is just about Black communities, it is. It’s just about poor communities, it is. I have a study that shows when, number one, when there is more policing in Black and brown communities, there’s higher level health problems, all the ones I just mentioned, if we're talking about use of force. But if you're in an area, listen to this one. If you're an area where there's more racial differences in use of force and it’s a predominately white area. Not me and you. I don't live in a white area. If I live in a white area and I'm seeing this kind of stuff, I have bad

apples. So this is the policing is a problem for everybody, not in the same way. In the question of physical health, we had higher, Asians who had better health across the board, if they saw police, police use force more, they had bad health.

So I'll stop and say these are spillovers. I don't need to have context, but I'm gonna give you something. It's really, it really hurts me. In New York City, there are 30 stops out of 100 residents. But if you are a Black person, they are, there is, listen to this, 1800 stops per 100 residents. So you can expect, within a year, if you're walking through New York City, you're a Black person, you live in a Black area, it is likely that you will be stopped at least once a month. Now, I'm not saying it is going to happen to you. And that's the point. That's the spillover. It might not ever happen to you. But what we get with hyper vigilance, what we get with hyper surveillance is the fact that just being in these -- you mentioned it, Jennifer, a climate of fear -- just being exposed to this carceral grief, that gets inside of your skin and you can't get rid of it. And it doesn't just matter if it happens in your area to you. It matters if you're in these larger spaces where there is hyper surveillance.

GILBERT: Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing that. That's really damning evidence in many different ways. And Jennifer talked about the declarations of racism as a public health crisis. And one of the sort of supporting arguments was that racism harms us all. Racism has an effect on everyone in the community in many of the same ways that you've articulated that hyper surveillance, police violence, police brutality harms us all in many different ways. Also, I want to, we have about 11 minutes. I want to ask the audience if they have some questions to start sending them in. We're going to keep this conversation moving along. I'm actually going to turn to Yanet to maybe share with us a little bit more about what the ACLU is doing in broadening the definition and public understanding of police violence and how that is included or focused on everyday forms of aggressive activity and behaviors from police.

AMANUEL: And thank you. Just to add on to it, Ali was saying about just the impact of this. You know, in Maryland, 64% of traffic stops are for Black people. We only make up 30% of the population. And what we really had to do with the legislature, especially through our advocacy recently, to prohibit police in Maryland from being able to use the odor of marijuana, especially now that it's a legal

substance, as an excuse to bypass their Fourth Amendment rights and search their bodies or their cars, was really just the impact these unnecessary stops and searches has on the individual.

Sometimes it's not always the case that the person is, you know, there's a negative interaction that leads to extreme violence, although that's definitely the case. But just the impact that that has on individual and the PTSD that they have. I know one person that went to the University of Maryland with me got stopped 24 times in one year and was searched each time, allegedly because the officer smelled the odor of marijuana. To this day, that is something that he carries with him and has basically an anxiety attack any time he sees those lights come up. That is a long-lasting impact that we see with people who have these unnecessary police interactions. Nothing was ever recovered. And in fact, we found in Maryland is that less than 1% of car searches result in gun seizures, which is what predominately the police said that they needed these odor searches to be able to retrieve.

So what we've really had to do with the legislators is explain to them it's not just, police brutality isn't just limited or the impact of isn’t just limited to deaths, but it's the everyday microaggressions and abuses that people, especially from working class backgrounds, are dealing with Whether there's unnecessary stops, whether it's just the assumption of guilt, all of these things do impact the individual. And part of the challenge is was forcing the legislature to really recognize Black people's humanity in the way that this was detrimental to that. And it was really a challenge with some because of a class difference, right? Some people who live in more affluent neighborhoods don't have some of these interactions. And so we would have to really do that education and bring those folks in to really explain to these issues to them. One kid we worked with, he was only 21 and had, all the charges eventually were dropped. But the amount of times that these negative interactions led him to having to be in court really significantly impacted him. And to this day and he's just he's just a kid.

And so we really, you know, continue to try to educate legislators not just about excessive force, at least death, but these everyday unnecessary interactions really hurts the community and it really hurts the police's efforts in their public safety efforts, right? Like Perri was saying, if the police doesn't don't trust you, they're not going to talk to you. And you need the community to be able to solve cases. And it's, sometimes even just witnessing the abuse itself is damaging enough for the person to lose trust

with the police. So if you're really serious about public safety, you need the community, but you're not, the same people you're harassing are probably the same witnesses that you need to close the case. And so that was that's something that we're ongoing, continuing to educate members about.

GILBERT: Thank you so much. Captain Johnson, you've already talked about, you know, a little bit about training in some of the work and programs you've been you've been involved in. And, you know, one of the narratives that Rashawn has written about this is this idea of the bad apples narrative. And I'm going to refer to the Lean on Me movie, which starred Morgan Freeman, and he offered this argument that at a community meeting, he said, well, you know, one idea to have one bad apple. But he said, well, what if I have 300? And so, you know, what happens then when you have an agency or an entire system of bad apples?

JOHNSON: You have a big problem because that means that's been allowed to go on for a long time. And that's coming from the top down. And depending upon where you are within that organization, it will determine how you impact change. In the city of St Louis, we had two police associations. We had a white one and a Black one, simply because the white one wasn't fulfilling the needs of the Black officers. So the Black officers got together and formed their own associations and they and, and they are completely different. You got some crossover in between, but they're completely different. The white one wouldn't stand up for officer, for Black officers' issues. So the Black one had to stand up for themselves and that's something that was created in a real-life scenario that shouldn't happen. But you're never going to have anyone high enough up to step out of their lane and say, No, we're not going to do that like this.

You know, a lot of people are complacent because they get power, they get to a certain level and they want to maintain that or they want to stay there. And so they get complacent, get complacent with that. Now, your best bet is, as an officer, and I often connected with political allies, local, local politics, that want a lot of the same things that we want and you start working on things together with that and sometimes you have to go around go around the people that are trying to prevent you. Because I ran into obstacles constantly, constantly.

I can remember sending officers to Milwaukee to do training on a program that we wanted to put in schools with the kids and my higher up would not sign off on it, wouldn't pay for it, so I paid for it out of my own pocket. And the training was tremendous. We end up doing having a professor come down and take a study on our kids and we could get a lot of data points on the results and figure out how we needed to work with that. But they never wanted to think enough outside the box to support something like that because it wasn't police work. They didn't deem that as police work. So long story short, if you have an agency like that, you've got to start weeding out the top ones and start replacing them with ones that are trained correctly and letting them know ahead of time what you're going to tolerate and what you're not going to tolerate. But you also had to be supported by whatever city that you're involved in.

GILBERT: Thank you. I want to bring Jennifer back into the conversation to offer some additional reflections about community engagement strategies. And we had a question even about substance use. And so maybe if you can help draw some connections between thinking about commune engagement, building, building those relationships, and even how may address public health issues such as substance and substance use and abuse.

ROBERTS: Yeah, sure. I think, you know, I think back to like some of the same similar statistics that was talked about by Ali and Yanet in terms of the police stops and even just here specifically in Baltimore, where I live, you know, I think about like each year, you know, the BP, BPD officers, they make, you know, several hundreds, thousands of, really, pedestrian stops per year. But what's interesting is in, in in Baltimore, where we have like over 200 different like neighborhoods, like almost half, about 44% of those stops were in just two small Black communities. And it's things about this concentration of just having this like this microscope on you all the time. And then even I think it was Yanet who was saying how, you know, how their friend has this kind of like almost this level of cortisol when they just see the car and like, I can even relate to that. I went to grad school in Baltimore and I was stopped a couple times on my way to school for, I don't even know what it was for. Very innocuous, like I didn't stop, I don't know. But it didn't yield any ticket or anything. But it still it gives me this kind of level of like stress. And so I think in order to kind of dismantle that stress, remedy that

stress, help prevent stress from occurring from other people, children coming up, is building that trust and building that trust in a very, very consistent way and a very, like intentional way.

And even something Perri had said that it didn't even click to me in terms of like being in cars. So back when they were used to just be like, you know, just walk the beat, just walking and being like, Hey, you know what? I'm going to do a community walk. I'll be here every Saturday, I'm going to do this community walk. In my neighborhood, there's a couple of officers and they're walking with us. You know, just that community. I mean, they're not in uniform or anything, but just their presence, they're walking. And so that helps to start to build trust and it helps to start to maybe repair trust that had already been fractured. And so I think that is something that is really important. And then also too, kind of, you know, elevate the level of doing some kind of level of physical activity as well. But and never really thought about in terms of that that barrier of the steel structure of the car. It just kind of, it's like you get those like those like moments where you're like, wow, that does kind of dinged with me.

And so I really do think that is one thing of just really building that connection and actually going slow, knowing that, you know, even though you're coming in, you maybe didn't do anything, you know, negatively. We still have an atonement that has to take place in terms of the community versus law enforcement. It's just, it's a very bruised relationship that's going to take it's going to take a long time for that to be corrected. And so, but as long as I think it's consistent and it's authentic, I think that will eventually get to a point where there's some level of a healthy relationship between the two entities.

GILBERT: Thank you so much. And I'll ask the panelists to maybe quickly offer up one indicator or metric of success as it relates to thinking about progress of police reform. And we'll close, we'll close the webinar. I'll start with Yanet

AMANUEL: Thanks. I'll keep it simple. I think the most effective way to measure real police reform is by establishing a process where the community has control of the police disciplinary process. So that means that those who cause harm to our community, the community would be able to levy consequences against those individuals. And that's really the only way for me to ever, and for people I

work with that well, you know, be true measure of actual progress. And this is a demand that really emanated from the Civil Rights and Black Panther Party movements in the 60s, and it was, you know, we're still working on that now.

GILBERT: Thank you, Yanet. Captain Johnson.

JOHNSON: I love that answer. Having the community having power over the discipline decision. That's awesome. I wish that, I wish that was a reality because the community needs to be involved like that. So one thing I can say is, if you can go into a community and they know their police officers' names and vice versa, that's a measure of success. That means there have been some extra efforts made to get to know people and understand what people are and who they are. I would always, oftentimes in my young career say, you know what? I want to take a golf cart, get all the good people out of my neighborhood because there's so many bad that are just in there doing things.

But you have to start by building those relationships. And as you build those relationships, you expound on them. I always say one of the things I wanted to do that I never got a chance to do was set up what we call a community CompStat. You know, there's a police CompStat where they go in and they just look at all the statistics. Crime is this, crime is that, what you're going to do, what're you going to do? Well, I would often say, hey, you know, why don't you bring resources to the table and have officers go out there and advocate for community members that need resources and come to this meeting and say, hey, you know, I got somebody needs this, I have somebody needs that and connect those resources. If you do that for a year, the impact that you would make in a community would sell itself.

GILBERT: Great. Jennifer.

ROBERTS: Yeah, I, I have actually. I think it too. I mean, aside from the usual metrics of, you know, stopping arrest data, crime rates, etc., etc., but the things that I think to me would be pivotal would be looking at the number of engagements between the community groups and the police. So the extent to which the police departments collaborate with community organizations, whether they're going to

community meetings or what have you. That's number one. And the number two, the diversification of the police force at all different ranks in terms of, you know, the beat cops, the detective, everybody in terms of their diversification along racial and gender lines.

GILBERT: Thank you. Ali Sewell.

SEWELL: The ballot box. I mean, I'm putting it out, I think we need to put police reform in the ballot box. Very short. There were 116,000 signatures that were brought to the city of Atlanta mayor to put Cop City, was its detention center to teach police how to police us, and they invalidated 80,000 of them. Had they not done that on the ballot box November 5th, we would have, as a people in the city of Atlanta, been able to remove the Atlanta Paternal Police Order, their impact from our city. Instead, we were not able to do that. There's 80,000 people who didn't come. And that's all the difference. I can imagine that maybe Georgia would have went blue this year just like they did in 2020. If we were able to put police reform on the ballot box, power to the people. And that's what I got.

GILBERT: Thank you so much. Thank you to each one of our illustrious guests and experts for participating in this panel. Many thanks to the Brookings Institution for hosting this webinar. And especially thank you to our audience for listening and for those who will catch us on the recording. Thank you so much for your time.