



**Seattle Office of
Inspector General**

January 9, 2022

Via Electronic Mail

Adrian Diaz, Chief of Police
Seattle Police Department
610 Fifth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104-1900

Re: Request to De-Prioritize Certain Traffic Offenses and Update on Workgroup Efforts

Dear Chief Diaz,

This letter describes the work to date of OIG, SPD, and SDOT to move the City forward in focusing police resources on violations that have an impact on safety, identifying roadway safety strategies that increase both safety and public trust, and eliminating sources of racial disparity in traffic stops. Eliminating traffic stops for civil, low-level, non-dangerous violations is gaining momentum across the country as communities continue to grapple with tragic traffic stops involving unnecessary deaths—both of motorists and police officers – and in the face of nationwide statistics on racial disparity in traffic stops.

In May of 2021, our partnership began when I reached out you to work with OIG to address the issue in Seattle.¹ Over the course of the summer, OIG convened a stakeholder workgroup to review issues and current interventions around SPD traffic stops from multiple perspectives, e.g., concern for public safety, reduction of community harm, disparate impacts to BIPOC individuals, and changes implemented or needed by SPD to improve data collection. OIG also, with the assistance of SPD, SDOT, and King County, began gathering data related to traffic stops by SPD, applicable regulations, and work by other jurisdictions.²

I appreciate the policy change you approved on August 1, 2021, requiring all traffic stops to be documented in the SPD records management system, following the implementation of a new system function capable of collecting this information. This allows SPD to assess racial disparity data for traffic stops, a requirement of Ordinance 125358 that will provide the City with valuable data moving forward in this and much other work.

On December 14, 2021, OIG convened the stakeholder workgroup for a half-day session of speaker presentations and a series of roundtables. At this session, SDOT highlighted its work to increase traffic safety through its principles of education, engineering, enforcement, and equity. SPD described its data transparency and existing policies that address bias in policing. The workgroup explored traffic data, debated impacts, and engaged in an intense discussion that

¹ Letter from IG to Chief Diaz about minor traffic offenses (May 18, 2021),

<http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OIG/Other/OIGDiazLetterMinorTrafficOffenses051821.pdf>

² Joint OIG/SPD Update on Traffic Stops (October 22, 2021).

highlighted the challenges that lie ahead to implement change in traffic enforcement thoughtfully and with due care.

These efforts have culminated in this request by OIG, supported by the work and collaboration of many stakeholders, including SPD and SDOT, to deprioritize certain traffic offenses. This first action step addresses certain regulatory violations that have little to no nexus with roadway safety. The initial list of offenses which SPD should no longer consider as a primary basis for traffic stops include:

- Registration of Vehicles
- Temporary Registration Permits
- Display of Registration Plates
- Equipment violations (e.g., Single head and taillight violations, window tinting, vehicle exhaust)
- Bicycle helmets

The stakeholder group involved in this initial stage of work included a wide range of individuals and organizations from the following (some in their individual or organizational capacity, as participants or observers):

- ACLU-WA
- Central Seattle Greenways
- City Council – Public Safety Committee
- Community Policing Commission
- Equal Rights Washington
- Fines & Fees Justice Center
- King County Board of Health
- King County Dept of Public Defense
- Kent Police Department
- Monitoring Team – Consent Decree
- Office of Police Accountability
- Policing Project at NYU Law
- Public Health Seattle & King County
- Ruiz & Smart, PLLC
- Seattle Municipal Court
- Seattle Department of Transportation – Transportation Equity Workgroup and Vision Zero
- University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School
- University of Washington
- Urban Indian Health Institute
- Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center

I'm deeply appreciative of the time and expertise lent by all to this effort. In 2022, the workgroup will continue to identify additional violations that could be eliminated or deprioritized for in-person enforcement, and to explore alternative responses such as use of engineering and technology to enhance and maintain roadway safety.



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I look forward to our continued collaboration with all of the other stakeholders to keep Seattle's roadways safe for all, and reduce the danger and harm to our community from unnecessary negative interactions between government and community. Thank you for your partnership in this important work!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Judge".

Lisa Judge
Inspector General