

**Status Report**  
**University of Michigan Task Force on Advancing Public Safety**  
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Advancing Public Safety at the University of Michigan Task Force (APS-UM-TF)**

**I. Introduction**

Following the social tumult that gripped the nation after the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among others, the University of Michigan found itself confronting the realities of policing, public safety, and race. Aspects of this churn have had a long history at the university. According to recent research by the Bentley Library, Ann Arbor city police and students at the university squared off in public entanglements over jurisdiction, authority, and power in the late nineteenth century. Often their differences exploded in public, violent clashes. Well into the last decade of the twentieth century, however, those debates seldom centered on race and policing, let alone African Americans and public safety. In part, the changes came as the university deputized and armed police officers in the latter years of the twentieth century and following highly publicized arrests or altercations with noted Black leaders on campus.

Since 1980 there have been three previous task forces or committees looking at public safety at the University of Michigan. The 2021 task force builds on those earlier efforts and has been charged to address four interlocking questions related to public safety on the Ann Arbor campus only (inclusive of Michigan Medicine) — (1) how DPSS responds to and interacts with members of our community, (2) how stakeholders experience interactions with DPSS, (3) where might there be missing or incomplete data and where can better research render better decision-making, and (4) what are recommendations for improvements. Our original charge was amended to acknowledge time constraints and invite the task force to undertake and complete the work charged to the best of their ability.

**II. Activities to date**

To facilitate the task force's work and meet the charge's goals and objectives, we have divided the group into five subcommittees. Subcommittee A has assumed the responsibility of understanding the past and current structure of DPSS, not just the police, but also DPSS's scope, duties, and responsibilities. Subcommittee B, meanwhile, is examining how DPSS interacts or interfaces with stakeholder constituent communities. Subcommittee C has accepted the task of exploring personnel and human resource practices within DPSS. Subcommittee D is pursuing questions of outreach and gathering new data related to DPSS. Subcommittee E is engaged in benchmarking and trying to determine best practices for public safety outside of the university. Each subcommittee has a lead, and each subcommittee meets

independently of the twice-monthly meetings of the entire task force. We have held four task force meetings and more than a dozen subcommittee meetings since the start of our work.

With our charge (original and revised) as a guide, the task force has committed to three public fora between February and April. The fora are designed to inform our final report due on April 30, 2021. We began with a public forum on February 9, 2021. The goal was to learn more about how community stakeholders experience public safety and security on the Ann Arbor campus. Additional fora are planned in March and April. The March forum will allow the task force to offer a status update. The April forum will provide an opportunity for the task force to share preliminary findings and potential recommendations.

Following the first public forum, we offered an opportunity for community members to share their experiences with DPSS or their sense of safety and security at the University of Michigan. In addition to the survey results, we have other requests for information that are being processed. To date, we have a comprehensive history of safety and security policies, practices, and structures, dating from the late nineteenth century, prepared by the Bentley Library. We have several current policies, procedures, and practices guides and templates as well. Quantitative data requests are also in the queue. However, record-keeping's decentralized nature at the university has proven to be a challenge and a hurdle as we strive to complete the assignments within the recommended time frame.

### **III. Status Report**

#### **Overall Task Force Updates**

According to our records, an estimated 175 or so individuals tuned in to watch the first public forum on February 9th. Twenty-six individuals spoke over the ninety minutes, a few twice. The speakers ranged from students and parents to staff and faculty, alumni, and community members.

During the first public forum, we learned that faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni had all had varying experiences with DPSS. The speakers shared their experiences with public safety broadly and DPSS, specifically, at the U-M. Several parents spoke about the relief they feel knowing that DPSS is available for their students' needs. Though, an overarching theme from the parent responses was that they wanted DPSS to remain on campus and not be defunded. Faculty and staff reflected on their interactions with DPSS and shared their first few weeks on campus and the challenges they experienced with DPSS. We also heard from graduate and undergraduate students who shared their experiences with DPSS, mainly not taking their complaints seriously and following through on their requests. Community members spoke about the relatively low crime in Ann Arbor and feeling safe due to the DPSS presence. These are initial take-aways from our preliminary review of the forum video and transcript. The task force is currently undergoing a more thorough review and analysis of the public forum files. It will use the results to inform the recommendations presented and discussed at the second public forum, tentatively scheduled for March 10th at 7:00 pm.

To supplement the information we received at the February public forum, another 432 individuals responded to a survey that allowed them to address specific questions and discuss their experiences. Through that channel, we heard from a broad swath of community stakeholders, including students, staff, faculty, parents, alumni, and others. Nearly a quarter of the respondents were either undergraduate or graduate students (10.41 and 13.75 percent, respectively). Staff constituted another quarter of the respondents (24.36 percent), faculty perspectives covering only 6.88 percent of those who wrote comments. By far, the largest group to participate came from parents, roughly 30.65 percent of the respondents.

While our analyses of the comments are just starting, some patterns already begin to emerge. The anonymous qualitative comments ranged the gamut from those who felt safe and thought a professional law enforcement presence added to that sense of safety to those who worried openly about an armed police force on campus. Of course, the Department of Public Safety and Security has a scope of duties much broader than the police. Still, for almost all of the commentators, DPSS equals the police department, particularly the sworn officers. As was confirmed during the public forum, many commenters praised DPSS and the job its members are doing. As expected, the range of that support moved from the full-throated to the tepid. In some cases, the concerns were about the current moment. For example, in a Covid context, several respondents voiced concern with how the university, generally, is handling the pandemic and, specifically, how DPSS is or is not making things better. Here safety and security had been elevated to matters beyond security personnel. One individual complained, for example, that DPSS refused to transport them for Covid testing when it was discovered the test was not linked to their university work. At the same time, another commenter thanked DPSS for ferrying a student to health services for a test.

We have a great deal of additional analysis to complete before we can authoritatively conclude the community thinks . . . . In the interim, a few observations stand out. First, some posit a relationship between the built environment, social landscape, and safety and security. Second, even those who praise campus policing also voiced some sense of a disconnect between service and full respect. One respondent, for example, noted after reporting a theft, “the officer was respectful but I sensed he did not think my issue important.” Third, a number of commenters worried that aggressive panhandling and a visible homeless population near campus contributed to perceptions of unsafety. And fourth, several respondents raised the issue of race and policing, offering either firsthand or secondhand observations of how the police made people of color feel vulnerable. Indicative was a comment, by one individual: “My son and a group of his freshman MT class who were all masked had an incident at the beginning of the fall semester. An officer approached them with his gun pulled because that had been reported as having violated covid guidelines, which they hadn’t. Several in there [sic] group were POC. They were quite terrified . . . . The officer acknowledged his mistake, and left, but not before causing great trauma to the whole group. . . .”

The events of the past fall, especially the GEO strike, played a role in comments as well. A number of the individuals who wrote opposed what they viewed as a campaign to defund the police. Some people equated safety with a visible police presence. A sizable number

acknowledged that they considered their child or children's personal safety a critical concern and selected the university only after being assured that the university had a trained police force. Some rejected the notion that anti-racism should be an institutional priority that came at the expense of support for the police. Others viewed calls for defunding the police with suspicion and voiced opposition to the undergirding assumptions supporting the idea. Meanwhile, some expressed that an armed force jeopardized the safety and threatened community members, especially people of color.

As we are learning, the issue of safety and security cannot be divorced from more extensive societal views on race, policing, and security. Even at this early stage, we are beginning to see patterns emerge that will undoubtedly find their way into our final report. Differences of perspective crosscut by race and gender, age and status, student and parent, faculty, and staff all intersect and inform when and how people seek safety. That said, while differences appeared in what's meant by security and safety, a consensus also exists that individuals have a right to feeling safe and secure.

### **Task Force Subcommittee Updates**

To help develop our work leading to a final report, five subcommittees have met over the last month, from three to six times. As noted above, this was in addition to the meetings with the full task force. Rather than providing a detailed exposition on each subcommittee's activities, we will summarize their work in three categories: (1) what has been done, (2) what was learned, and (3) what remains to be done.

Subcommittee A has met six times and has requested various data about DPSS organization, jurisdiction, regental mandate, and collective bargaining agreements. Thus far, we have learned the distributed nature of data and concerns about privacy matters make the collection and release of certain information more challenging than other data. Second, we have a better understanding of jurisdictional boundaries, and we have come to realize that certain public-facing websites may need additional updating.

Subcommittee B has also met six times. At present, the committee has reviewed all pertinent information made available, has reviewed external documents that advertise best practices and has read reports from groups charged with oversight or who have critical views of contemporary policing. Of notable help has been attention to institutional and DPSS practices and procedures and published reports on criminal activity on and near the Ann Arbor campus. As a result of the initial examination, the subcommittee has worked with the Healthy Mind Survey to add mental health and policing questions. Among the things learned at this stage is that the definition of a complaint impacts what is collected, how it is collected, and what we stand to learn. Looking ahead, the committee hopes to review forthcoming data and make a judicious set of recommendations that would improve overall effectiveness.

Subcommittee C meets every other Friday during weeks when the entire task force is not meeting. The committee has explored recruiting, hiring, and DPSS demographics; training, development, and DEI; promotions, recognition, and contracts; and reports, complaints, and

discipline. As of this report, progress has been made in understanding contacts, recruiting, hiring and demographics, and DEI. That said, there is additional work in each area to complete as well other data to review. Access to that additional information will ultimately shape the final recommendations, especially related to how DPSS measures achievement of stated goals compared to industry-wide standards.

Meanwhile, Subcommittee D, helped by the Bentley Library history of DPSS through 2013, has pursued other investigatory avenues. Their time has been spent reaching out to student groups, working with administrators of the Healthy Mind Survey, meeting with graduate students to facilitate focus groups, and seeking information for the post-2013 period of DPSS. The committee has learned a great deal about earlier chapters in the university regarding public safety and security and the importance of anchoring some ongoing work in regular institutionally distributed surveys. Looking ahead, this subcommittee will mine the materials already collected and analyze the results of the focus groups and surveys.

Finally, Subcommittee E, which has met periodically, has focused on five primary tasks: empirical literature reviews, field survey of campus police reforms, data requests, participation in external public safety forums, and identification of experts for consultations and advice. Thus far, the literature review falls into two major categories: attributes of campus police and police departments and calls for campus DPSS and police reform or abolition. The literature review points us in at least two directions. One points to why colleges and universities have maintained an armed law enforcement presence, notwithstanding evidence that racial profiling occurs and taxes people of color disproportionately. The other raises the question of the abolition of armed police on college campuses. As the subcommittee continues its work, it will continue to investigate both reform and abolition literature, calling in external experts for advice as needed.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the topic of safety and security at the University of Michigan invites reaction and commentary from a broad cross section of stakeholders. That kind of investment ultimately redounds to the benefit of all and aids our efforts to develop a safety and security approach that is best in class. As we move into the next month of examination and exploration, a lot of work remains to be done. Requested data have yet to be seen, focus groups and other community engagements have yet to be held or are in the process of being held, and critical analyses of obtained data, as well as requested data, are to be completed. We thank all who have contributed to our understanding through this stage of our deliberations, and we look forward to working with others as our work continues. Undoubtedly, between now and the end of April, questions will emerge that fall outside our charge scope or that cannot be satisfactorily answered in the time we have. As a result, we can anticipate one recommendation that calls on the university to continue some aspect of the task force's work well beyond the end of this term. In the period ahead, we will offer other recommendations, too. This brief report summarizes what has been achieved to date.