

Hearing All Voices on Stop & Frisk

By Germain Thompson

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Last month, community advocates [stood alongside](#) two teenage students in the Bronx who said they were unfairly stopped by police officers. Alongside advocates and their families, the teens, who are honor-roll students, said they were followed before being stopped and frisked by officers.

Advocates are calling for federal intervention and examination into the NYPD's practices. However, oversight of the department's use of stop and frisk is already in place – but, as this latest incident may suggest, there is more work to be done.

I was appointed late last year as the Community Liaison to work alongside a federal monitorship tasked to oversee the police department's stop, question and frisk practices. The monitorship was put in place by a federal judge overseeing lawsuits filed against the City over police stops and trespass enforcement policies. The most notable case, *Floyd v City of New York*, some may remember, was the so-called Stop and Frisk case in which the judge ruled in 2013 that the pattern of police stops by the NYPD was unconstitutional.

The Federal Monitor team, led by Mylan Denerstein, who took over for the late Peter Zimroth, has released [numerous reports](#). Its most [recent report](#), published this past June, examined reported stops conducted by Neighborhood Safety Team (NST) units, which were created last year to address gun violence in high crime areas. Unfortunately, the Monitor's report noted that more than 97% of people encountered were Black or Hispanic and that about a quarter of stops made by some of the NST units they examined were still unconstitutional.

My Office's mission is to include community feedback into the process of reform as ordered by the federal court. In doing so, we operate independently from the police department and also the plaintiffs who filed the lawsuits. Our team is primed to conduct outreach to community based organizations, faith-based institutions, advocacy groups and even local precinct community councils in order to obtain feedback about people's experiences with police stops and trespass policing.

We want to hear from people across the five boroughs, with an emphasis on residents in the neighborhoods with the highest rates of police stops. We want to hear from people impacted, some of whom may be supportive and some who may be highly critical of the police. Our mandate is not only to talk to New Yorkers about their experiences with police stops, we also seek to collect feedback about trespass enforcement, especially in NYCHA locations.

All of this information will be reported to the Monitor and the court as the judge weighs whether or not the NYPD is in compliance with remedial requirements.

While some may think that the era of Stop and Frisk is over, stops continue. Last year there were 15,022 reported stops by police, up from 8,947 in 2021. More recently, police reform advocates [indicated](#) that police stops for the second quarter of this year were the highest for any quarter since 2015. While these numbers are a far cry from the highs of 2011, when police reported over 685,000 stops, police practices must still be done fairly, and most importantly, constitutionally.

As the latest incident in the Bronx appears to show, some members of our communities feel they continue to be victimized by the NYPD.

But it is also important to emphasize that police stops and frisks can be done legally. New Yorkers should know when police are allowed to make stops, which the department sometimes refers to as investigative encounters. They are authorized to detain a person and make a stop (sometimes referred to as a Level 3 investigative encounter), so long as they have reasonable suspicion that the person stopped was committing or about to commit a crime; police can frisk a person if they reasonably believe that the person is armed and dangerous. Police can also make “Level 1” and “Level 2” encounters where they can ask questions but the person is free to leave. Police engaging in a stop must turn on their body-worn cameras. [City law](#) also requires officers to identify themselves during a stop and to provide a business card during certain encounters.

Last month also marked ten years since the ruling in the Floyd case. Since that time, there have been passionate calls for racial justice as well as a need for better police-community relations. In order for those things to be possible, there needs to be resolution on the issue of how and when the police can make stops or enforce trespassing laws in a manner that doesn't violate people's rights.

I believe that including the voices of those experiencing policing on the ground brings us closer to the goal.

Mr. Thompson was appointed as the Community Liaison by a federal judge last year.