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New Report Documents Staggering Racial Disparities in Charleston Policing Arrests and Citations

Charleston community organizations provide Charleston's elected leaders with blueprint for building a Charleston that is safe and just for all

Charleston, SC - Today, the Charleston Peoples' Budget Coalition released a new report, *Building a Safe and Just Charleston: From Eliminating Racist Policing to Investing in Life Affirming Services*, that documents staggering racial disparities in arrests and citations made by the Charleston Police Department (CPD). Based on data from the CPD's Open Data Portal, the report found that CPD continues to spend the majority of its time arresting people for low level offenses like marijuana possession and open container of alcohol and does so with a staggering racial bias.

Key findings include, between January 1, 2020 and June 31, 2021:

- CPD gave out 20,655 citations and made 5,098 arrests.
- 15.5 percent of arrests were for violent charges.
- 84.5 percent of arrests were for low-level or non-violent charges.
- Black people were arrested at 3.8 times the rate of white people.
- Despite being only 21.7 percent of Charleston's population, Black people comprised:
 - 39.6 percent of open container of alcohol in a vehicle arrests
 - 40 percent of disorderly conduct arrests among all age groups
 - 54.8 percent of open container of alcohol arrests
 - 66.7 percent of public urination arrests
 - 71 percent of all marijuana possession arrests
 - 81.7 percent of marijuana sale arrests
 - 71.3 percent of marijuana possession arrests
 - 77.4 percent all arrests among youth
 - 78.6 percent of driving under a suspended license arrests
 - 96.6 percent of disorderly conduct arrests among youth
- Black drivers were almost 8 times as likely to get a citation for a license violation than white drivers.
- Black drivers were arrested for a suspended license at 12.5 times the rate of white drivers.
- Black people were cited for marijuana possession at 9.6 times the rate of white people.
- Black people were arrested for marijuana possession at 9.4 times the rate of white people.
- Black youth were arrested at 10.4 times the rate of white youth.

The report looks at arrest and citation data from two distinct periods of CPD policing. It first looks at 2015 to 2020 - the five years leading up to the publication of the CPD racial Bias Audit in November 2019. It then looks at January 2020 to June 2021 - the 18 months after the publication of the audit. As the report documents, CPD has continued to arrest Black people at a staggering rate, and for many of the most common offenses the racial disparity has become worse since the audit's release.

The report also documents how Charleston's elected officials continue to define crime in ways that are often disconnected from actual harm and how these leaders have failed to prioritize the safety and well-being of all residents. Instead of prioritizing the city's resources to ensure that all residents have housing, reparations, a living wage, decent public transportation, and other necessary life affirming services, city leaders provide approximately \$50 million each year - the city's largest annual single expenditure - to the CPD.

Below are comments from Charleston Peoples' Budget Coalition members:

Shaquille Fontenot, co-founder, Lowcountry Action Committee

"Charleston's elected leaders have failed to prioritize the health and safety of their residents. Charleston residents have long suffered from high rates of shelter poverty, flooding, toxic environmental conditions, food insecurity, and limited access to jobs that pay a living wage. These conditions stem directly from the institution of slavery and from Charleston's long history of racist policies and practices. Charleston's Black and Brown residents have, and continue to be, disproportionately harmed by these inequitable systems. It is past time for Charleston to prioritize the health and safety of all of its residents."

Marcus McDonald, Lead Organizer, Charleston Black Lives Matter

"Charleston's elected leaders continue to invest in a police department that enforces laws with a staggering racial bias. Centuries after policing came to Charleston in the form of a slave patrol, its modern version continues to enforce laws with a staggering racial bias. For the well-being of its residents, Charleston must drastically reduce the size, scope, and role of CPD."

Suzanne Hardie, CAJM Policing Committee Co-Chair, Charleston Area Justice Ministry (CAJM)

"Our organization pressed the city of Charleston to conduct a Racial Bias Audit of the Charleston Police Department. Since that time, racist policing in Charleston has only gotten worse. Despite the November 2019 audit that found racial disparities throughout CPD policing and commitments from CPD leadership to do better, CPD continues to arrest Black people at staggering rates compared to white people. CPD cannot police itself. It's time for elected leaders to step in."

Helen Mrema, Community Organizing Advocate, ACLU of South Carolina

"Real policing reform requires a reduction in policing, not just procedural reforms. Contrary to what we see on television, in reality law enforcement spend the vast majority of their time policing low level offenses like marijuana possession. CPD is no exception to this rule."

Charleston must stop turning police into society's "solution" for substance use, misbehaving children at school, unhoused people, and people experiencing mental illness, to name just a few."

Cora Webb, Program Director, We Are Family

"This report solidifies a fact that we already knew: policing is not done for the benefit of our communities. Policing can never be reformed because it's founded on brutalizing people under a corrupt system for profit. The Charleston Police Department gets over fifty million of our tax dollars a year, but what is the outcome for our communities? Millions of dollars to the police to over patrol Black and Brown neighborhoods and make thousands of arrests for non-violent charges. We are forced into a cycle of our tax dollars going to the police, police arresting and brutalizing our communities, the state making money from unpaid labor of imprisoned people, and no one being accountable to meet the basic needs of our community. We can break this cycle by reinvesting money into our communities. People should not be homeless, hungry, and alone while the CPD receives millions to ride around and do as they please."

Belvin Olasov, Co-founder, Charleston Climate Coalition

"The climate crisis will take the fault lines in the Black and Brown communities of Charleston -- the decaying and unsafe housing, food insecurity, wealth inequality, flooded neighborhoods, and environmental toxins -- and deepen them into collapse. When we most need to be building resilience, we cannot let CPD continue its systemic harassment and disruption of Black and Brown communities. As this report shows, racist over-policing has only worsened in the past year. We should be investing in weatherizing our communities, rebuilding and fixing homes. This, unlike increased policing, has actually been proven to reduce crime and harm."

The report can be found [here](#).