

Fall 2019

**Boston City Council Candidates
Public Safety Questionnaire**

Candidate: Julia Mejia

1. Immigration and Policing

Thousands of people are arrested each year in the City of Boston for minor offenses like driving without a license, drug possession, and disorderly conduct. Data obtained by the ACLU shows these minor arrests disproportionately impact Black and Latinx Bostonians. Each time the Boston Police arrest someone, there is the potential for ICE to be notified — putting our immigrant neighbors at substantially greater risk for detention and deportation. Charges for these minor arrests are often dropped, but there is collateral, and often irreparable, damage.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to limit the number of arrests for minor offenses in Boston? Please list your policy goals related to this issue.

***MEJIA:** I support DA Rollins' memo regarding decline to prosecute. I also think the BPD needs to work with the DA's office to ensure that not only is prosecution not happening but that those arrests are not happening to start. The arrests around Cass & Mass are a current example; people ended up spending several days imprisoned due to timing, ability to pay the bail fee, etc. Therefore, more coordination between the two law enforcement branches is vital.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you encourage the police commissioner to exercise greater discretion and stop making arrests for minor offenses?

***MEJIA:** Yes*

The Boston Police Department's (BPD) existing policies allow officers and intelligence analysts to collect and share information about people who are not suspected of criminal activity with the federal government. For example, the Boston Regional Intelligence Center (BRIC) is a unit of the Boston Police Department that gathers, analyzes, and shares intelligence — like the gang database — with federal law enforcement. However, the database disproportionately documents men of color, using broad identification criteria. The BRIC possesses an unknown amount of information about Boston residents, is not subject to public oversight, and has the power to put people at risk of surveillance, police stops, and deportation.¹ Data from the BRIC was recently used to deport at least one Boston Public School student, when a BPD incident report — which contained unsubstantiated allegations that the student was a gang member — was shared with ICE.² The BPD's information collection and sharing policy puts immigrants, people of color, protesters, and journalists at risk when that information is shared with federal agencies under the Trump administration.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to create transparency and oversight of the BRIC? What will you do to address the Boston Police Department's policy of sharing information about people not suspected of criminal activity with the federal

¹ Dooling, S. (2019, July 26). Here's What We Know About Boston Police's Gang Database. Retrieved from <https://www.wbur.org/news/2019/07/26/boston-police-gang-database-immigration>.

² Dooling, S. (2018, December 13). What A Boston Student's Deportation Reveals About School Police And Gang Intelligence. Retrieved from <https://www.wbur.org/news/2018/12/13/east-boston-student-discipline-to-deportation>.

government?

MEJIA: *I will advocate for a public commission that includes activists, community organizers and residents from across the city. The commission will report out publicly.*

I would call for strengthening the Trust Act to ensure that the Boston PD has no contact whatsoever with ICE. As well, I would call for limits on ICE intervention in schools and city agencies – so that all Bostonians can interact with the police/criminal justice systems without fear of criminal retaliation or deportation.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support ending the gang database?

MEJIA: *Yes*

2. Surveillance of Muslims

Boston was named a pilot city for a federal "countering violent extremism" (CVE) campaign in 2014. Since then, a number of Boston institutions, including the Boston Police Department, have been involved with programs funded by CVE grants. One such program, the Youth and Police Initiative Plus, focuses on Somali youth who are deemed a potential threat due to the social and economic trauma that they experience as immigrants and refugees. CVE programs across the country have NOT made communities safer, but instead have deterred political participation and access to social services for Muslims.³

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to ensure funding is available to support social services for immigrant communities, and that this funding is not tied to law enforcement?

***MEJIA:** No response.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support ending BPD's involvement in any community outreach programs that credit false and stigmatizing theories about predispositions toward violence or "extremism," including Youth and Police Initiative Plus?

***MEJIA:** Yes*

Law enforcement should not investigate people unless officers have reasonable, articulable suspicion of involvement in criminal activity. The FBI does not require a criminal predicate for Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) investigations, which often have no connection to anything ordinary people would recognize as terrorist activity; in fact, current federal policy allows the FBI to investigate anyone based on no suspicion of criminality whatsoever. The problematic relationship between local law enforcement and the Joint Terrorism Task Force has been recognized by San Francisco, CA and Portland, OR. As a result, both cities have formally cut ties with the Joint Terrorism Task Force.^{4/5} BPD collaboration with the FBI, which has historically targeted Muslims for improper surveillance and entrapment operations, puts Muslim Bostonians at risk of federal harassment.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to protect Muslim Bostonians and activists from unwarranted federal harassment and surveillance?

***MEJIA:** Strengthening the Trust Act and explicitly advocating that the city does not enable/support harassment.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support efforts to end BPD collaboration with the Joint Terrorism Task Force, as the City of San Francisco has done?

***MEJIA:** Yes*

³ Fact Sheet: Countering Violent Extremism: Myths and Facts: Brennan Center for Justice. (2015, November 02). Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/countering-violent-extremism-myths-and-facts>.

⁴ Nakashima, E. (2017, March 10). San Francisco Police Department pulls out of FBI anti-terrorism task force. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/san-francisco-police-department-pulls-out-of-fbi-anti-terrorism-task-force/2017/03/10/62e05bcc-fd09-11e6-8f41-ea6ed597e4ca_story.html.

⁵ FAQ on withdrawing from the Joint Terrorism Task Force. (2019, February 12). Retrieved from <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/hardesty/article/712320>.

3. Racial Profiling

According to data from the Boston Police Department, as analyzed and reported by The Boston Globe, 70 percent of the nearly 15,000 individuals that police observed, interrogated, or searched in 2016 were Black. Meanwhile, Black people make up 25 percent of the population in Boston.⁶ Black and Brown people are also punished more harshly than white people for drug offenses. Although people of color in Boston make up less than 28 percent of people convicted of drug possession, they are roughly 55 percent of those convicted of drug distribution and 75 percent of those convicted of mandatory minimum drug offenses.⁷ Similar disparities encouraged the City of Providence to require data collection of any police stops or searches through the Community-Police Relations Safety Act.⁸

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to eliminate racial bias in policing, besides previously proposed plans of hiring more officers of color?

***MEJIA:** Bias training must be fully incorporated and ongoing. We need to move beyond a workshop or two to address bias and ensure that we reevaluate our trainings overall to ensure that we are not using violence/guns as a first option. We need to take active steps to dismantle the ways in which racism is institutionalized. Training is one, hiring staff that reflects the communities they police is another, being willing to tackle head on the systemic issues facing our city is another. Just as importantly, we need to also create stronger infrastructure for community input regarding hiring as well as strong, enforceable accountability measures addressing reducing racial bias in the workforce.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to make the Boston Police Department conduct an audit of their arrest data, to include racial disparities in arrest rates for drug offenses?

***MEJIA:** Yes*

⁶ Ransom, J. (2017, August 29). Blacks remain focus of Boston police investigations, searches. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/08/28/blacks-remain-focus-boston-police-investigations-searches/PDbFr2QZexCEi3zJTO9mOJ/story.html>.

⁷ Surveys of Massachusetts sentencing practices. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/lists/surveys-of-massachusetts-sentencing-practices>.

⁸ Providence Community-Police Relations Act. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://providenceri.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_Legifile.aspx?MeetingID=6206&ID=3786.

4. Drug Arrests

According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the opioid overdose death rate is 120 times higher for those recently released from incarceration compared to the rest of the adult population.⁹ While the overdose and drug contamination crises have moved some politicians to discuss the importance of harm reduction services and a public health response, our local and statewide laws and budgets still prioritize punishment rather than a public health response to drug use. For over 50 years, the criminalization of drugs and of people who use and sell drugs has failed to curtail drug use and substance use disorder; the policy has also led to the arrest, punishment, and imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of people — a majority of whom are people of color — and limited resources for education, treatment, economic empowerment, housing, and other social services outside the criminal legal system.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what are your policy proposals to increase access to long-term treatment, limit arrests for drugs, and implement evidence-based harm reduction services, such as safe consumption spaces?

***MEJIA:** I'm proud that when I released my policy platform, I am one of the few running for City Council that explicitly stated my support for harm reduction policies including Safe Injection sites. I would call for the expansion of the number of needle exchange locations.*

I'd like to place more focus into prevention measures as well. I'd call for the expansion of resources to fund education and public announcement initiatives that inform all communities on the responsibilities of working within our communities to prevent the spread and effects opioid and other substances have on families and on the very individuals with substance addiction.

I would work with the Office of Recovery Services to conduct studies on substance abuse among subpopulations and marginalized communities. We also need to do more to coordinate the work being done at area hospitals, schools, city government with regard to the long lasting trauma that this crisis is creating across the city. I would also like to explore ways in which the city can hold the pharmaceutical companies financially responsible for their role in creating and exacerbating the opioid crisis.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support curtailing law enforcement responses to drug use, ending arrests for personal possession and small sales of all drugs, and instead implementing a public health referral response based on human rights?

***MEJIA:** Yes*

⁹ Chapter 55 Data Visualization. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://chapter55.digital.mass.gov/>.

5. Electronic and Digital Privacy

In June, the City of Somerville became the first East Coast city to ban municipal use of facial recognition technology. This technology is replete with racial and gender bias. Private companies are aggressively pushing its use on police departments across Massachusetts, endangering people's civil rights and civil liberties. There are currently no statutory protections in place to guard against abuse or misuse of this flawed and biased surveillance technology.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to ensure Bostonians' privacy rights aren't being invaded by face surveillance technology?

MEJIA: *I will advocate as possible that budgetary support doesn't include face surveillance as well as fighting for a Public oversight committee.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you vote in favor of an ordinance to ban the municipal government from using face surveillance technology, as Somerville, San Francisco, and Oakland have done?

MEJIA: *Yes*

Cities and counties across the country, including Cambridge and Lawrence, Massachusetts, have enacted policies to require transparency and City Council approval of surveillance technology acquisitions by city agencies.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to ensure transparency and democratic accountability around new surveillance technology acquisitions?

MEJIA: *Public hearings around all new technology acquisitions, public accountability for how it is being used. We need to be requiring documentation, actual accountability when BPD comes before City Council.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you vote in favor of an ordinance to require City Council approval before city agencies use or acquire surveillance technologies?

MEJIA: *Yes*

6. Plainclothes Policing

Several tactical units of the Boston Police Department patrol in plainclothes. They often drive unmarked vehicles while wearing street clothes. We lack crucial public information about the Youth Violence Strike Force, the Drug Control Unit, or the Anti-Crime units. This missing information includes: number of officers, budget, equipment used, complaints received, stops made, and arrest data. In New York City, plainclothes police officers are involved disproportionately in fatal shootings.¹⁰

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to ensure transparency and assess the impact of tactical units on community wellbeing?

***MEJIA:** The establishment of a civilian compliance review board composed of residents, activists and social justice serving organizations informing policies and practices while also serving as an oversight committee will help address these issues.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support the abolition of plainclothes policing?

***MEJIA:** Yes*

¹⁰ The Intercept. (2018, May 09). Plainclothes NYPD Cops Are Involved in a Staggering Number of Killings. Retrieved from <https://theintercept.com/2018/05/09/saheed-vassell-nypd-plain-clothes/>.

7. Overtime Spending

Within a budget of more than \$414 million for FY2020, the Boston Police Department budget allocated over \$58 million for overtime.¹¹ Police overtime spending exceeds spending on youth jobs and community centers.¹² Current overtime policies allow for excessive spending, including a mandate that officers testifying in court are paid for a minimum of four hours even if they're in court for less than an hour. Boston Police officers also collect pay for thousands of hours for construction details, while civilians flaggers work those sites in other cities and states.

If elected or reelected to the City Council what will you do to curb excessive overtime spending and invest in community social services?

***MEJIA:** I support enabling the city council with more ability to influence the budget process, which would include an adjustment to the allocation of budgetary control set in our current city charter.*

I would institute a real participatory budget process, opening the process for neighborhood meetings to discuss and review the city budget, with input from local neighborhood residents. As well, I would create a set of metrics that will measure the impact of legislation and policies within each of our 22 neighborhoods.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to impose stricter limitations on police overtime spending and invest cost savings in housing, education, youth jobs, and drug treatment?

***MEJIA:** Yes*

¹¹ City of Boston. (2019, June 13). Budget. Retrieved from <https://www.boston.gov/departments/budget>.

¹² "Budget | Boston.gov." <https://www.boston.gov/departments/budget>. Accessed 2 Jul. 2019.

8. Transparency and Public Accountability

The Boston Police Department has made some progress in terms of opening its data to the public. But currently, arrest data and stop-and-frisk data are not available to the public on an ongoing basis via the city's data portal. These data can be posted online without compromising the privacy of Boston residents. Stop-and-frisk and arrest data are critical to understanding the impact of policing in Boston.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what data will you use to evaluate police performance?

***MEJIA:** I would use a 360 accountability tool to solicit feedback from the broader community as well: this means that we will approach and evaluate police performance from a holistic point of view and by looking at neighborhoods individually, that will help us give light to any discrepancies across neighborhoods in Boston, and will help us find and address the root of the problem. This would be a great way to identify areas of growth and opportunity.*

I think it is also crucial to ensure that we are not simply using quantitative data, but also qualitative data that will help capture a clearer picture of our Boston PD.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to make Boston Police arrest data and stop-and-frisk data, including race information, available to the public in real time?

***MEJIA:** Yes*

9. Community Oversight

While Boston has taken steps to allow for community review of civilian complaints against police officers, in the form of the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel (CO-OP), the panel has limited power to hold officers accountable. The current CO-OP is made up of a former judge, and a former city employee. In their 2018 report, the members found that only 25 percent of cases that they reviewed were found to be not fair, not thorough, or both.¹³

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what steps will you take to increase accountability and community oversight over policing in our neighborhoods?

MEJIA: *When I released my platform, I put having a community based accountability committee as critical. We need to do a racial analysis across the City to evaluate and make public the findings. We cannot change things we do not name.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support replacing the CO-OP with a well-funded, independent, community-based complaint review body with the power to subpoena, investigate, discipline, and fire police officers?

MEJIA: *Yes*

In response to input from Boston community members, the Boston Police Department is in the process of implementing a limited body-worn camera program. Unfortunately, the program includes a dangerous provision allowing officers to review body camera footage before writing incident reports. Criminal defendants, on the other hand, do not have the same right to view incident footage before giving statements to police.

Please describe the role you think body cameras should play at the Boston Police Department.

MEJIA: *Cameras play a pivotal role in providing eyewitness testimony. All officers should be wearing them and there should be strict repercussions if they are not activated during a shift.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to change the body-worn camera policy to prohibit officers from viewing footage prior to writing incident reports?

MEJIA: *Yes*

¹³ City of Boston. (2018, July). Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel. Retrieved from https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-07-2018/annual_report_2017_2016.pdf.