

Fall 2019

**Boston City Council Candidates
Public Safety Questionnaire**

Candidate: Kenzie Bok

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.

***BOK:** I was proud to support Rachael Rollins for District Attorney; she has taken strong steps to focus the Suffolk County DA's office on major crimes rather than charging minor offenses. But as pointed out above, arrests for minor offenses can still have major collateral consequences even if no charges are brought, and such arrests tend to disproportionately affect young men of color. My overarching policy goal would be to encourage the police to take a different tack: if we're seeing a high degree of property crime or disorderly conduct in an area, what could discourage such activity before it happens, rather than responding with arrests? This is the result everyone, including neighbors, would prefer, so I would like to see BPD routinely doing such analysis and making it an explicit internal goal to minimize minor arrests while maximizing public safety. Public agencies tend to orientate themselves around whatever they measure, so we should definitely ensure that no one is using number of arrests as a yardstick of an officer's value to the force. I also think that reducing emphasis on minor arrests could help us clear our significant backlog of unsolved non-fatal shootings, a category of crime that, left unaddressed, makes many of our most vulnerable community members feel particularly unsafe in their neighborhoods.*

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?

***BOK:** 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

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>.

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 government?

***BOK:** From the bill of rights forward, Americans have a long tradition of skepticism about unnecessary government surveillance. Current technology makes it very easy to gather and share massive quantities of information about local residents, but we should nonetheless still apply a strong standard of necessity to any such efforts. As a City Councilor I would use annual budgetary authority over BPD to demand greater transparency on the operations of the BRIC. I would also push for a further amendment to the Trust Act to change BPD policy so that information about those who are not suspected of criminal activity is never shared with the federal government. It's essential to our civic life to avoid any policy that encourages a default attitude of suspicion towards members of any given community; databases like BRIC tend to cast that kind of wide trawling net over whole groups of young people, which undermines community relationships with law enforcement and fractures our broader civil society. Putting a name in a database is not a neutral act; it always inevitably changes law enforcement's attitude towards an individual, and the unforeseen consequences can be especially far-ranging when information is shared and decontextualized across agencies. I believe that BPD can effectively conduct specific gang investigations without maintaining such a database.*

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

***BOK:** Yes*

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>.

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?

***BOK:** As a former volunteer organizer within the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO), I've been fortunate to see firsthand how ISBCC functions as a vibrant community center, and to become aware of the rich heterogeneity of Boston's Muslim community. That community is itself deeply concerned with providing a healthy culture for its young people and blocking any extremists who might try to prey upon them; I believe that the design of programs that meet community needs have to emerge from within. As I saw firsthand over the time I spent in Britain, where CVE approaches are common, the tactic of treating all Muslim community events as potential occasions for anti-terrorism work is exhausting and alienating to community members. Programs that combine social services with surveillance too often result in a chilling effect, discouraging utilization of such services and sowing seeds of mistrust that undermine efforts at building community and our common civic life. The appropriate response to community trauma is trauma care, not surveillance, and I will say so in the context of City Council budget hearings. Programs that give young people opportunities for leadership and growth are more effective and more genuine when not mixed with surveillance in this way. One only has to go to a community iftar at ISBCC during Ramadan, where an array of young people organize operations and ensure that every visitor gets fed, to see what organic community leadership and service looks like.*

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?

***BOK:** 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

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>.

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?

***BOK:** The free practice of religion in America should guarantee that one's faith tradition does not change the rules that apply in regard to government surveillance. A federal focus on over-policing Muslim Americans is driven by prejudice rather than data, and thus puts members of Muslim communities at risk. Most non-Muslim residents would be uncomfortable with law enforcement deciding to track their church or social club networks under a vague anti-terrorism mandate; we need to increase interfaith education and understanding that Muslim communities are no different. As a City Councilor, I would seek to build public awareness of the important role that Muslim Bostonians play in the life of our city, and the indignities that Muslim community organizers too often suffer for their work around the country. I have participated in a number of in-depth interfaith initiatives in the past, from shared organizing around affordable housing to a three-week residential program of shared scriptural reasoning, so I am eager to partner with and support Boston's Muslim leadership in this vein.*

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?

***BOK:** Yes*

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?

***BOK:** In addition to hiring more officers of color, we need to prioritize training in combating unconscious bias, de-escalation, and community policing strategies in order to eliminate racial disparities in police interactions. When officers know community members well, police action is less likely to be influenced by stereotypes of any kind, because bias takes its firmest hold in the absence of real relationship. I have heard many older white Bostonians talk about times in their youth that they were caught involved in drugs or theft and shown leniency by police officers. Many of these individuals have gone on to have long careers making major contributions to our city, all of which would have been cut off by a harsher stance in that critical moment. We need to show the same hopefulness and investment in the potential futures of black and brown youth today.*

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?

***BOK:** 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?

***BOK:** Opioids are ravaging our neighborhoods and communities; we can all see it, and no one is untouched. But I agree that we have shifted our rhetoric on drug use faster than our policies. Effectively diminishing such use requires investment upstream in the kinds of supports that make it easier for people to pursue purposeful lives. If we treated the moment of release from prison with the same urgency and public resources with which we treat the moment of an overdose, we would have far fewer overdoses. And we have to reckon as a society with the fact that, even as we decry drug use in our public spaces, we don't provide enough long-term treatment beds to serve those seeking recovery help. So we can't achieve short-term fixes, nor sweep the problem from sight, without a revolution in our social commitment to making treatment and recovery possible. I would join other Councilors in calling for the state to increase its provision of resources across the continuum of care, while also advocating strongly for increased funding for the kinds of upstream social services that can prevent addiction from taking hold. I also think the BEST clinicians who ride alongside BPD have a very beneficial effect on police interactions with individuals struggling with mental health challenges, and we should invest more in assigning clinicians trained in harm reduction strategies to partner with police units that most frequently interact with drug users.*

I support safe consumption spaces because they save lives. While campaigning, I have seen someone overdose and drop to the ground in the middle of Berkeley Street; I had to stand in a lane of traffic to make sure he wasn't run over. Fortunately, a staff member at a nearby shelter had Narcan and was able to revive him after three doses. I carry Narcan with me now, but the chances of the right person having Narcan at the right time are far too haphazard. Safe injection sites acknowledge the reality of drug use across our city and seek to keep users safe until such a time as they're able to pursue recovery services. We need broader acceptance of harm reduction ethics and increased investment in harm reduction strategies. Boston should seek to lead the way on safe consumption spaces despite the federal ban; our efforts as a city can help provoke the

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

state and the federal government into greater action.

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?

BOK: *Yes*

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?

***BOK:** I have followed the legislation in Somerville and would support similar efforts to limit the use of facial surveillance technology in Boston, especially in light of its demonstrated flaws in correctly identifying people of certain backgrounds. I also don't think we should allow advances in what is technologically possible drive our decisions about the spirit in which we want to live together. A sense of constant surveillance can cast a pall over social life and cause people to treat each other with artificial suspicion and reserve; we should weigh such potential damage very seriously before implementing new practices in this regard.*

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?

***BOK:** 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?

***BOK:** I oppose the militarization of American society generally and the huge expansion of the surveillance state. I think that technologies acquired 'just in case' tend to take on a life of their own: once possessed, a force naturally looks for an opportunity to use them. So I would definitely support introduction of an ordinance to require public notice and City Council approval for the acquisition of new types of surveillance technology. I was concerned by the Boston Police Department's unannounced acquisition of drones in 2017, and the decision to test them on the site of a public housing development showcased exactly how such technologies can quickly lead to differential infringement on the civil liberties of low-income residents and people of color. Too often new equipment is thought of as merely tools, without attention to how the introduction of drones buzzing overhead or tank-like vehicles in the street can themselves increase hostility and mistrust between communities and police.*

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?

***BOK:** 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?

***BOK:** Anything done in secret by public agencies needs to meet an especially high bar of justification, so it is imperative that the City Council and the public have as much data as possible on the operations of any plainclothes tactical units. I would actively pursue such data in my role as a City Councilor, and would also ensure that we solicit community input in order to understand the full impact of such tactical units on the communities in which they operate. I also think it would be important to solicit information about the quality of counseling and support for officers in such units – histories of similar operations have revealed that involved officers often end up feeling isolated and ethically conflicted, which is another hidden community cost.*

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

***BOK:** YES with caveat. YES in general principle, as I agree that long-term plainclothes policing operations tend to foster a lack of accountability and confused ethical lines, but I feel I would need to become further educated as to whether there are some limited circumstances in which plainclothes policing might be appropriate*

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?

***BOK:** While the move a few years ago to truth-in-budgeting about public safety overtime costs in the City of Boston has at least more fully acknowledged the scale of those expenses, they remain much too high. As a Councilor I would encourage structural changes that try to build many current overtime activities into regular officer schedules, even if this means increasing the size of the force, so that fewer hours are paid at an overtime rate. I also do think we should use the budget scrutiny process to ask BPD to justify its recurring overtime expenses in relation to direct benefits to public safety. It's exactly right to juxtapose these routine overruns with the city's funding for youth jobs and youth-oriented programs, which operate on a shoestring budget yet are some of our most impactful anti-violence interventions. We should absolutely be looking to cap overtime spending in order to increase direct spending on youth programs, and I will advocate for this shift in resources as a City Councilor.*

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?

***BOK:** 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?

***BOK:** I am definitely in favor of adding stop-and-frisk and arrest data to the data shared by BPD with the public; in order to have honest public conversations about differential policing in different communities, we need to have that data to draw upon. In terms of how I would evaluate police performance, I think we need to shift towards outcome-related measures; just as we should be measuring doctors by the health of their patients rather than the number of procedures carried out, we should measure police departments by the safety of the city, not by numbers of stops or arrests. And especially in light of how our carceral state creates a vicious cycle of high recidivism, to the detriment of public safety and the destruction of communities, we should be taking a holistic approach that views keeping people out of prison as one of the most important upstream interventions that the police department can make. At their best, our police officers can be like our best doctors of preventative medicine: addressing small issues before they ever blossom into major ones. As with the medical profession, we need to find ways to suitably honor and value that crucial but too often invisible work.*

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?

***BOK:** 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?

BOK: *I am strongly in favor of independent civilian review boards; police power is used on behalf of the public, and so the public needs ultimate oversight over how it operates. I support an empowered, independent board with transparent procedures and real power to intervene in cases of misconduct, along the lines advocated by Campaign Zero. As a City Councilor I would advocate for this major reform as perhaps the most important step we could take to ensure accountable policing.*

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?

BOK: *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.

BOK: *I supported the body camera pilot and support the current program, but agree that the opportunity for police to review footage prior to incident reports seems vulnerable to abuse. I do not think body cameras are a panacea; in some respects video can be artificially authoritative when in fact another angle or more context on a situation would change our understanding. There is also a risk that a network of police body cameras could in future be paired with facial recognition software and other technology to feed the kind of wide-ranging population surveillance that, as discussed above, can undermine civil liberties. We need to be vigilant on this front. But given the important role that video recordings have played in cases across the country, I think the current program is sensible, and encourages respectful interactions in both directions between police and the Bostonians they serve.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to change the body-worn camera

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.

policy to prohibit officers from viewing footage prior to writing incident reports?

***BOK:** Yes*