

Fall 2019

**Boston City Council Candidates  
Public Safety Questionnaire**

**Candidate: Jonathan Allen**

## 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.

**ALLEN:**

- *A public health approach is necessary to identify the social determinants of driving without a license, drug possession, and disorderly conduct -- which itself is determined according to a “certain normal” without acknowledgement of gaps in access to income and quality education for many Black and Latinx Bostonians. I will work to commission public hearings on minor arrests to help gather more data to develop more innovative solutions for protecting immigrants and Bostonians of color.*
- *To avoid an arrest and criminal record, issuing non-criminal Citations that require participate in Diversions and/or Restorative Justice programs can decrease the number of arrests for minor offenses.*
- *Community Engagement is a crucial determinant of arrests frequency in communities. I will support efforts underway to enhance positive and progressive relations between communities of color and the Boston Police Department.*
- *I will advocate and support initiatives and development for elected officials and police officers aimed at descaling arrests for minor offenses.*
  - *This includes addressing racism and systemic/implicit biases in policing.*

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?

**ALLEN:** 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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?

***ALLEN:** I will advocate that the BRIC become subject to public oversight consistent with other publicly accountable units.*

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

***ALLEN:** Yes*

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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?

**ALLEN:**

- *I will advocate that the Council reject funding for services to immigrant communities tied to law enforcement.*
- *I will support city policies which provide support and funding for social services for immigrant communities. Any services or programs provided that include a purpose of counter-terrorism should focus on building community relations and rejecting extremist narratives. The policies should not result in the alienation of muslim persons. The agencies responsible for administering the services should utilize trauma-informed practices and approaches.*
- *To ensure that support services for immigrant populations are funded, I will advocate that the Mayor include this in the city's budget and that future grant proposals do not include programs tied to law enforcement.*

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?

**ALLEN:** 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4/5</sup> 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?

***ALLEN:** I will advocate to the Mayor and Police Chief and Commissioner that it is not in the best interest of our citizens to continue to work with the Joint Terrorism Task Force (“JTTF”). BPD must work to help keep our communities safe. Part of ensuring safety includes BPD’s ability to foster relationships with members of the community, who include Muslim Bostonians. If the federal government wants to conduct investigations with the help of BPD, they must have reasonable and provable suspicion of the person’s involvement in terrorist activity. Since that is not their current policy, we should continue advocating for protecting civil liberties and cut ties with the JTTF.*

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?

***ALLEN:** Yes*

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<sup>4</sup> 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](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).

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> Similar disparities encouraged the City of Providence to require data collection of any police stops or searches through the Community-Police Relations Safety Act.<sup>8</sup>

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?

**ALLEN:**

- *Hiring more officers of color is really just a proxy for the real issue -- neighborhoods with an insufficient amount of police officers living in their community. I would propose that the Mayor create a pipeline for recent graduates to become officers and police in those neighborhoods.*
- *I will advocate for greater early pipeline education to increase exposure of law enforcement careers for our youth.*
- *In addition, I would propose that the Mayor's budget includes increased funding for racial/implicit bias training and data collection of police interactions to demonstrate the level of bias and show if bias trainings improve the disproportionality in racial profiling.*
- *I will hold the BPD accountable by demanding transparent reporting of arrest rates for drug offenses to assess racial profiling disparities.*

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?

**ALLEN:** Yes

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<sup>6</sup> 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>.

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

<sup>8</sup> Providence Community-Police Relations Act. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://providenceri.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail\\_Legifile.aspx?MeetingID=6206&ID=3786](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.<sup>9</sup> 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?

**ALLEN:**

- *I will advocate for greater resources for education, treatment, economic empowerment, housing, and other social services outside the criminal legal system.*
- *I will also advocate to increase funding towards community based treatment facilities with emphasis on evidence-based harm reduction services. Such advocacy will be through an equitable lens addressing disproportionate funding of community organizations serving significant low-income and minority populations.*
- *I will advocate for greater use of diversionary drug programs and law enforcement training which emphasises a policy to refer opioid cases to hospitals and public health entities instead of jail time.*

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?

**ALLEN:** Yes

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<sup>9</sup> 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?

***ALLEN:** I will advocate for statutory protections against infringing facial recognition technologies. The City of Boston should also propose a similar ban as Somerville on the use of facial recognition technology by law enforcement agencies. Facial recognition technologies far outpace the general public's understanding. There are currently no systems in place to regulate the use of this powerful technology. Without careful oversight, the technology could lead to the expansion of tracking and surveillance of the residents of Boston. The use of this technology could exacerbate racial inequalities if used to target certain communities with larger populations of people of color or immigrants.*

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?

***ALLEN:** 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?

***ALLEN:** The City Council and residents should vet new surveillance technology to ensure no undue or disproportionate privacy infringements.*

*This will include holding public forums educating constituents on the pros/cons of proposed new surveillance technology and receiving community and expert feedback.*

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?

***ALLEN:** 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.<sup>10</sup>

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?

**ALLEN:**

- *I will advocate for greater accountability and reporting by plainclothes patrol. Plain Clothes units should satisfy the same reporting requirements as marked or identified officers.*
- *I will also advocate that plainclothes officers wear body cameras.*

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

**ALLEN:** Yes

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<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> Police overtime spending exceeds spending on youth jobs and community centers.<sup>12</sup> 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?

***ALLEN:** I will advocate for comprehensive review of BPD overtime spending and identify areas for reallocation of resources into community social services (youth jobs and personal/professional development, education, and housing and drug treatment). Such review should include extensive discussions with BPD about overtime spending justifications to determine alternatives for accomplishing policing goals and demands.*

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?

***ALLEN:** Yes*

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

<sup>12</sup> "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?

***ALLEN:** I will advocate for policy which requires quarterly updates of relevant arrest and stop-and-frisk data. With more frequent updates, the data can be used to determine and tailor appropriate police training. The data can be used to determine whether there has been any improvements in the area of bias policing and whether additional corrective steps need to be taken by certain precincts.*

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?

***ALLEN:** 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.<sup>13</sup>

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

**ALLEN:**

- *I will advocate for an expanded Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel (CO-OP) from two (2) or three (3) to nine (9) members. This will provide representation from each district in Boston. In addition, I will advocate to ensure the CO-OP is equitable representative of the demographics most affected by police misconduct.*
- *I will work to increase awareness and education on ways for the public to identify and report police overreach and abuse.*

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?

**ALLEN:** 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.

**ALLEN:** *Body cameras should be used for evidentiary purposes. Police officers should not have direct access to footage and should not be granted access to review footage prior to writing their incident reports. Footage should be preserved as unbiased and untampered with evidence.*

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?

**ALLEN:** Yes

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<sup>13</sup> 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](https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-07-2018/annual_report_2017_2016.pdf).