

Statement by the Durham City council on International Police Exchanges

The Durham City Council appreciates receipt of the memo dated April 4, 2018 from Chief C.J. Davis to City Manager Tom Bonfield stating that “there has been no effort while I have served as Chief of Police to initiate or participate in any exchange to Israel, nor do I have any intention to do so.” The Durham City Council endorses this statement by Chief Davis and affirms as policy that the Durham Police Department will not engage in such exchanges.

The council opposes international exchanges with any country in which Durham officers receive military-style training since such exchanges do not support the kind of policing we want here in the City of Durham.

We recognize and share the deep concern about militarization of police forces around the country. We know that racial profiling and its subsequent harms to communities of color have plagued policing in our nation and in our own community.

In Durham, our community is working towards a time when we are beyond policing—when everyone has a good job and excellent health care and a safe, warm, affordable place to live. Until that time comes, we want policing that is founded on earning the trust of the community. We want policing that effectively reduces gun violence without any racial profiling ever. We want policing and a justice system that do not criminalize small acts such as drug possession.

We are moving in that direction in Durham. Under the strong, persistent leadership of Chief Davis and her staff, the police department is undergoing a profound cultural shift which is evident in the numbers in the annual reports we have just received for 2017.

The reporting shows that while violent crime is on a 17-year downward trend in Durham, we are also undergoing an extremely dramatic shift in the way Durham is engaging in police work. Traffic stops in recent years have dropped from 32,227 to 11,578. Searches of cars have dropped from 1,296 in 2013 to 416 in 2017. Charges for drug violations in Durham are down from 1,223 in 2015 to 673 this past year. Our new Misdemeanor Diversion Court has kept hundreds of first-time offenders free of a criminal record. Use-of-force complaints by residents are down from 33 in 2016 to 15 last year. Chief Davis' new U-Visa policy has resulted in immediate improvement for our undocumented residents who assist in solving crimes, as 35 residents received U-visa approval from the department in the first quarter of 2018, far more than ever before.

An array of new police department policies and practices are working in Durham, and – as the numbers above show with striking clarity – these reforms are today making a positive difference in the lives of thousands of people, especially in communities of color.

The council knows that we still have much progress to make. Although police searches have dropped precipitously among all groups, black motorists are still more likely to be searched than white motorists, and we need to continue efforts to ensure that the racial make-up of our police department more nearly represents Durham's diversity.

The council is deeply committed to this work, and we are grateful to Chief Davis for leading this cultural shift.

Black lives matter. We can make that phrase real in Durham by rejecting the militarization of our police force in favor of a different kind of policing, and that is what we are doing in Durham now.