

The Commonwealth is Missing in Action When It Comes to Ensuring Police are Guided by Best Practices & Policies for Working with Massachusetts Youth: Now is the Time to Act

Cambridge, MA. June 11, 2020. Massachusetts is not doing enough to train law enforcement in how to work with youth, and in particular youth of color.

The results are plain to see: for a state with an overwhelmingly progressive reputation, Massachusetts is one of the **top 5 worst states** in the nation when it comes to racial disparities in its juvenile justice system. And these differences can't be ascribed to differential levels of [offending](#).

“We must seize this national moment in Massachusetts to push for change in how we police youth, and specifically youth of color,” said Lisa H. Thureau, Founder and Executive Director of Strategies for Youth. “We’ve been able to offer training to some law enforcement officers and agencies in Massachusetts. Most officers want to learn best practices and be guided by policies that support best practices. But too often, law enforcement leaders say their hands are tied and they can’t make changes. The state is missing in action when it comes to best practices for police interactions with youth.”

Massachusetts state agencies are not ensuring that police recruits and officers are **trained** to de-escalate interactions with youth, avoid arresting youth for minor infractions, and assure use of force is minimized. Massachusetts has not issued model policies to create uniform statewide standards to guide law enforcement officers. Few law enforcement agencies around the state use developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, racially equitable policies to direct practices of law enforcement.

In 2019, the Massachusetts State Auditor Suzanne Bump issued a [report](#) documenting that while Massachusetts has one of the highest hourly requirements for in-service police training in the nation, the state does not provide sufficient training opportunities to allow officers to meet this requirement and has no mechanism holding officers and municipalities accountable for meeting it. “Modern policing requires that officers have access to cutting-edge training on topics such as de-escalation and dealing with individuals with mental health or substance use challenges. However, it is clear the Commonwealth’s approach to police training has strained municipal government budgets and left local departments to fill the gaps left by the state.”

Currently, Massachusetts is also **one of only four states** that do not have a police licensure and certification process in place for in-service training. For years, efforts to establish a Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) system, which would set minimum training standards and regulate training programs and licensure, have been delayed.

“The absence of mandated training for patrol officers, the diluted and weakened legislative language requiring training for school resource officers, and the state’s failure to create any institutional mechanism to oversee policing, needs to change,” said Thureau. “Right now, the state’s wealthiest law enforcement agencies can afford training, resulting in justice by geography. **All** Massachusetts kids deserve the best policing.”

Strategies for Youth, formed in Massachusetts 2010, is a national, nonprofit policy and training organization dedicated to improving police/youth interactions and reducing disproportionate minority contact. SFY began training law enforcement officers in Massachusetts and now works in 21 states across the nation. www.strategiesforyouth.org