

LAW & JUSTICE

Portland's Racial Profiling Reality

Recognition grows that racism is behind numbers

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A new report on traffic stops by Portland Police finds that minorities are still being pulled over by officers at a disproportional rate, but for the first time police Copwatchers say police have begun to recognize that racial profiling is a reason for the disparity.

The current statistics were recently presented during a public meeting. The accountability groups Portland Copwatch and the Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform, presented their analysis of the data.

According to the analysis, the number of traffic stops of African Americans compared to their representation in the population continues to be irregularly high.

"Even though it may not be a conscious decision on a daily basis, racism is embedded in the way institutions are set up to discriminate against people of color in jails, our police, and many say the school system," said Dan Handelman, one of the founders of Portland Copwatch and active member of several steering committees.

"And many of these institutions exhibit disparities and unequal treatment because it is the way they have been designed, even if it isn't intentional," Handelman said.

Although the number of those being searched has gone down since 2004, he said the proportion of Portlanders of color who

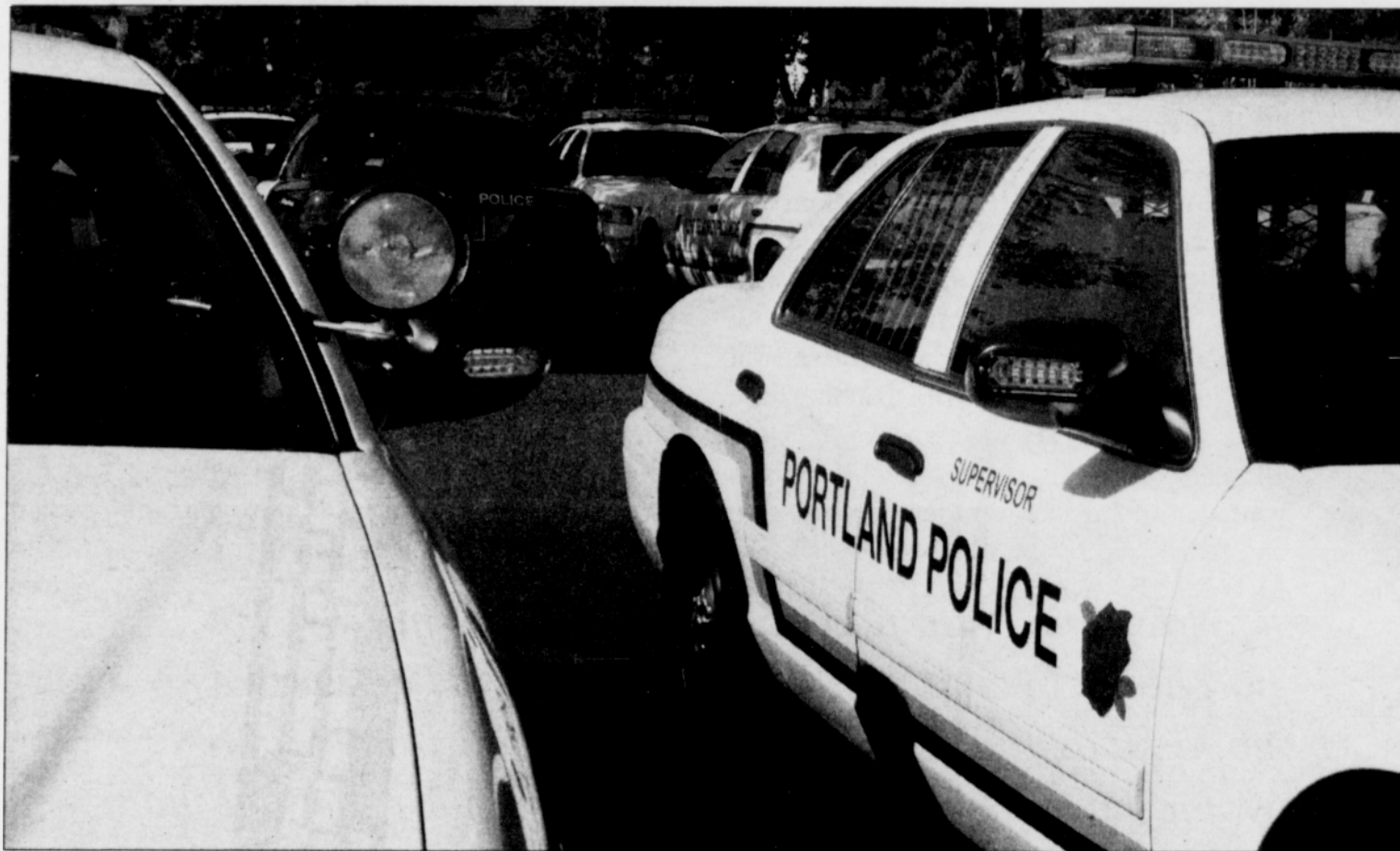


PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Portland Police racial profiling data shows that minorities in Portland continue to be pulled over in traffic stops disproportionately to other drivers.

are searched remains twice as high as their white counterparts.

Handelman said, in the past couple of years, the bureau has carried out training to lower the number of times when searches are appropriate, which has definitely led to a decline.

He said, however, the disparities between African Americans and whites have remained the same. The numbers went down from 25 percent of black drivers and 12 percent of white drivers searched to 14 percent of African Americans and 6 percent of whites searched.

According to Handelman, improvements have been slow because of an unconscious denial of racism within the police bureau.

"There is always more work to do unfortunately," he said. "And every time you think you made a little bit of progress there is something else that pops up that needs attention."

The police bureau began to

release racial profiling data on an annual basis in 2004, and it has become increasingly clear that minority communities in Portland are being stopped disproportionately to white people, he said.

Although it is mentioned in the Constitution that it is illegal to search a person without suspicion, Handelman said it becomes extremely telling when officers make the decision to search somebody because they think they have some kind of contraband on them.

"Those rates (number of searches) have been consistently, for African Americans and Latinos, twice the rate of white people since 2004," he said.

Beginning in 2006, data showed African Americans were being stopped and searched four times their representation of the population.

"Even though, they are actually searching fewer people over-

all, the percent and difference between how many white people

and African Americans and Latinos are being searched has remained the same and gotten a little worse," he said.

What is more telling, he said, is how often they find contraband on people based on race. "So their claims of not being able to see what kind of race a person is goes out the window."

According to Handelman, while the police bureau conducts more searches of African Americans and Latinos, but they are also finding less illegal items on them.

"The police were saying there is no such thing as racial profiling and explaining the numbers saying you can't always see what color a person is at night," said Handelman. "But it is not the stops that have gotten worse; it is the question of what happens

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Wells Fargo Lending Award

The U.S. Small Business Administration office in Portland has named Wells Fargo its 2012 Community Spirit Lender of the Year.

The SBA selected Wells Fargo for this award based on the company's "impactful lending across the board" to socially or economically disadvan-

tagged business owners in Oregon and southwest Washington.

Wells Fargo made the highest percentage of loans to veteran, minority and woman-owned small businesses in fiscal year 2011 in this region, according to the SBA.