Report of Working Group on Reimagining Public Safety at MIT

I.   Charge to Working Group

In response to the Petition to Support Black Lives at MIT submitted by the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA) and the Black Students' Union (BSU), and at the request of President L. Rafael Reif, a working group of faculty, staff, and students was established to review how the MIT Police are used on campus and to determine whether there are alternative public safety models that could better address the needs and improve the experience and safety of the MIT community.

II.   Consultant

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), a non-profit police research and policy organization that provides technical assistance and education to support law enforcement agencies, was selected to assist the working group. PERF's role was to conduct focus groups with students, faculty, and staff to better understand the experience of MIT community members when interacting with the MIT Police and, on that basis, to recommend changes to improve the community's relationship with the MIT Police and enhance MIT community members' feelings of safety on campus.

The head of PERF happens to be an MIT graduate, which brought a helpful perspective to the project. Throughout 2021, PERF conducted multiple focus groups, met with members of the MIT Police collectively and individually, reviewed MIT Police operations and service data, and reviewed MIT Police policies. In late March 2022, PERF submitted a report summarizing the information and data that it had collected, benchmarking best practices for university policing, and providing recommendations for the working group to consider.

The working group met five times to determine which of the PERF recommendations it would endorse for implementation.

III.   Recommendations

While the working group agreed with and supports many of PERF's recommendations, there was not unanimity that all the recommendations should be implemented[1].

The PERF recommendations that the working group endorses are summarized below. [2]

A. *Create a Category of Unarmed Community Service Officers*

Data that the MIT Police provided on calls for service over the past few years show that the majority of calls to police dispatchers that MIT Police respond to are routine and do not necessarily require the presence of an armed police officer. Having an armed police officer

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[1] The student representative did not support PERF's recommendations for enhanced police trainings and more community-oriented policing, stating that they would rather see resources prioritized elsewhere.
[2] Some proposals may require bargaining with the Campus Police Association.
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respond to such calls can create feelings of anxiety and unease for many members of the MIT community, particularly when those calls occur in MIT residence halls.

To address this, responsibility for responding to incoming calls related to alarms, lockouts, wellness checks, medical assistance, and calls for escorts could potentially be transitioned to unarmed "community service officers" (CSOs).

For certain calls, it could also be appropriate to employ a hybrid or co-response model, in which a CSO and an MIT police officer would both attend to a call, with the CSO taking the primary role in interacting with the MIT community member(s) and the police officer present in a support capacity. The working group noted that many Boston-area schools have successfully implemented a similar approach and strongly recommends that MIT consider adopting such a model.

The working group members all agreed that the unarmed CSOs should be clearly distinguishable from the MIT Police. In addition, the student participants articulated that the CSOs would need to have a skill set, training, and culture distinct from that of the MIT Police. For that reason, as well as to avoid any potential conflicts of interest, the student members felt the CSOs should not be under the supervision of the MIT Police.

The specifics of how a CSO operation on the MIT campus would work will require further thinking. As PERF recommends, if MIT decides to implement a hybrid, co-response model, the Institute should create a working group to plan and implement a limited pilot co-response program first, since moving to a full co-response model is a major undertaking that would require substantial resources and careful planning.

B. *Create a Co-Response Model for Mental-Health-Related Calls*

A corollary to the creation of an unarmed CSO model for routine calls is to adopt a co-response model for calls describing mental health concerns, typically in on-campus residences. PERF recommends having a trained clinician on staff who is available to respond with the police to mental health calls, arguing that this could help de-escalate individuals in crisis and ensure the right level of care and services are being provided; the working group strongly supports this recommendation.

To coordinate the creation of the co-response model for mental health calls, MIT should form a working group with representatives of the Police Department as well as from MIT Student Mental Health and Counseling Services, and Student Life. The CSO program and this co-response model will have to be carefully coordinated.

C. *Improve Dispatch Services*

Since 2018, MIT has been using civilian dispatchers to take calls. Currently, although the MIT Police department has budgeted headcount for nine dispatchers, it employs only four,[3] as the department has had difficulty hiring and retaining civilian dispatchers. Chief John DiFava

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[3] Since this report was submitted, the department has hired more dispatchers, so the total is now seven.

indicated that the MIT Police have found that dispatchers do not always receive complete and accurate information from the callers/reporters. As a result, officers sometimes respond to a scene expecting one type of call and encounter something quite different.

Better training and the hiring of more experienced dispatchers should address this issue and create a strong dispatch center, which would become even more important under a CSO model in which MIT Police are instructed to stand back during certain calls for service. For all these reasons, the working group strongly recommends that, along with considering a hybrid model for responding to calls, MIT Police resolve the current issues with Dispatch Services.

Given the challenges the MIT Police have faced with staffing dispatch, MIT may want to consider engaging a consultant to assist with hiring, retention, and training of civilian dispatchers. The scarcity of qualified dispatchers is prevalent throughout Massachusetts and is not unique to MIT. That said, Chief DiFava has indicated that MIT's pay scale for dispatchers is not competitive, particularly given that MIT's dispatchers also need to pay for parking, which has resulted in difficulty hiring and a low retention rate for those in the role.

D. Establish a Standard Procedure on Number of Police Responding to Calls for Service

An area of concern reported in focus groups and repeated by several members of the working group was that MIT Police sometimes send out more officers than necessary on some calls. When several police officers respond to what appears to be a fairly routine or non-emergency call, it can exacerbate an already tense situation and potentially escalate rather than deescalate the situation. The working group recommends that the MIT Police develop a written protocol specifically focused on limiting the number of responders, depending on the nature of the call.

E. Increase Transparency to the Community of Police Policies, Procedures, and Data

The working group supports PERF's recommendation that MIT Police policies and operating procedures should be readily available for members of the MIT community to review on the MIT Police website and that more information about police interactions with MIT community members should be provided to the community on an annual basis (i.e., citizen complaints against police, number and type of internal affairs investigations and outcomes). Additionally, the department should add data on their calls for service, arrests, and operations.

The MIT Police have already taken steps to improve transparency and provide information about operations to the MIT community. The MIT Police webpage offers answers to [frequently asked operations questions](). The department has also recently updated or is in the process of updating many of its policies, including those on Use of Force, Internal Affairs and Officer Complaint Investigation Procedures, and Bias-Free Professional Policing.

F. *Update Process for Determining When Police Details and Metal Detectors are Required at Campus Events*

The working group discussed the concern among some MIT community members that events either sponsored by certain student groups or where many Black students will be in attendance are required to have heightened security measures, while events hosted by other groups are not. The working group agreed that there needs to be improved transparency and consistency around the requirements for when police details and metal detectors are required at campus events, who is responsible for making those decisions, and who should pay for those services. We recommend that Chief DiFava report back on this issue to the soon-to-be-formed community advisory group (See Recommendation G, below).

G. *Create a Community Advisory Group to Provide Feedback Regarding Campus Safety*

The working group agrees with PERF's recommendation to establish a community advisory group that could gather feedback from the community through surveys and other tools, make recommendations, and work with the MIT Police on ways to improve public safety and police services on the MIT campus. We note that in 2002, Chief DiFava created an advisory group in this spirit, but participation dropped off over time and the group eventually dissolved.

The new advisory group should include representatives from undergraduate and graduate student groups, including the Black Graduate Student Association and the Black Students' Union, postdoctoral fellows, staff, and faculty. There was some disagreement over the proper role of the advisory group. However, the consensus of the membership recommends the role of the advisory group should be to examine any concerns raised by community members or community groups regarding police operations, generate new ideas or solutions for policing and public safety in the MIT community, and make recommendations to MIT on established police policies and practices as well as on how public safety on the MIT campus can be improved. While the advisory group can and should play an important role in reviewing police operations and recommending improvements in public safety, it should not be a policymaking body.

The advisory group should meet with the MIT chief of police, deputy chief of police, and executive vice president and treasurer at least once a year to present community feedback regarding MIT policing and provide recommendations for ways to improve public safety on the MIT campus.

IV. Next Steps

While recognizing that moving forward on some of these recommendations will require further consideration and work, the working group urges MIT's senior administration to review this report and the background from PERF, establish a timeline for taking action, and share a communication with the community on what will be implemented.

Working Group Membership

Chairs

Mark DiVincenzo, *Vice President and General Counsel*

Melissa Nobles, *Chancellor*

Chelsea Nneka Onyeador[4], *Graduate Student, Aeronautics and Astronautics; former political action chair, Black Graduate Student Association*

Ufuoma Ovienmhada SM '20, *Graduate Student, Aeronautics and Astronautics; former Co-President, Black Graduate Student Association*

Student Representatives

Kelvin Green, Class of 2022
Deon Mitchell, *Undergraduate Student, Department of Chemistry*

Faculty Representatives

John Fernandez, *Professor of Architecture and Building Technology, Dept. of Architecture*
Ceasar McDowell, *Professor of the Practice of Civic Design, Dept. of Urban Studies and Planning*
Alberto Rodriguez, *Class of 1957 Career Development Associate Professor, Dept. of Mechanical Engineering*

Staff Representatives

Suzy Nelson, *Vice Chancellor and Dean for Student Life*
Blanche Staton, *Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Education; Director, Office of Graduate Education*
David Randall, *Senior Associate Dean, Student Support and Wellbeing, Division of Student Life*
Karen Singleton, *Associate Medical Director and Chief of Student Mental Health and Counseling Services, MIT Medical*
Beatriz Cantada, *Director of Engagement for Diversity and Inclusion, Institute Community and Equity Office*
DiOnetta Jones Crayton, *Associate Dean and Director, Office of Minority Education*

Police Representatives

Steven DeMarco, *Deputy Chief, MIT Police*
Panashe Flint, *Sergeant, MIT Police*

Advisors to the Committee

Ahsan Ali, *Manager, Labor Relations, MIT Human Resources*
Allison Romantz, *Counsel, MIT Office of the General Counsel*

Submitted August 17, 2022

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[4] Chelsea Onyeador stepped down as one of the co-chairs mid-way through the process.