

# CITY OF GREAT FALLS

## *Great Falls Police Department*

112 1st Street South, Great Falls, MT 59401

(406) 771-1180



To: Mayor Kelly, City Commissioners, and City Manager Greg Doyon  
From: Chief Bowen  
Date: 7/31/2020  
Ref: Annual Report detailing traffic stop data

There have been questions surrounding a part of the annual police report that involves the number of traffic stops conducted on our minority groups. Specifically, the concern is that there are too many traffic stops and citations issued to Native Americans as compared to their population numbers within our city/county. The annual report has historically used the population numbers provided by the 2010 census. As we have looked at the data over the years, we did not identify race-related profiling for traffic stops, even though the numbers appeared to be disproportionate according to the population percentages.

Upon investigating more closely, we have discovered that the Native American population has been grossly underrepresented in our community. For the remainder of this document, I will be referring to Native Americans as American Indians (AI) and Alaskan Natives (AN), as those are the terms that more accurately reflect the population in question. According to the 2010 census, the population of American Indians in Cascade County is 3019; however, we have discovered that the population is at a minimum 3 times that amount. By considering those who identify as AI/NA alone and AI/NA in combination with another race, the overall percentage of the population is not 4.8%, as indicated by the census, but rather closer to 12%.

I have included a bar graph to illustrate this fact, as well as an explanation about the contents of the graph. The first bar within the graph represents the 2010 census numbers, the second bar depicts the number of AI/NA according to the UIH Inst. 2017 report, the third bar combines the number of AI/NA in combination with another race, and the colored bar is the total of column's 2 and 3.

# Cascade County American Indian/Alaskan Native Population



AI = American Indian ; AN= Alaskan Native

Source: American Community Survey, 2010-2014 . Urban Indian Health Inst.

Montana Highway Patrol discovered the error of relying on census data when they hired an independent company to provide an analysis of their traffic stops with regard to minorities. The study states; *“Denominator data used for comparison in the earliest studies was based on census data, which has been thoroughly criticized for failure to adequately reflect the racial make-up of our population as a whole, as well as not reflecting the racial makeup and driving behavior of drivers in given jurisdictions.”* (Alpert et al. 2007; Whitney 2008; MHP Traffic Stop Data Analysis, Governmental Studies and Services 2016).

An increasing number of American Indians are moving to more urban settings, including Great Falls. Over 70% of their population are considered Urban Indians (Urban Indian Health Inst. 2017). Additionally, an article in the Tribune (2016) points out that the American Indian population is increasing at a higher rate than the white population in the state of Montana; *“The Indian population is growing faster than the white population and now makes up about 8 percent of its 1 million residents.”* Because of our close proximity to two Indian reservations, availability of a variety of services, and enrollment in higher education institutions, it is unclear how many American Indians are in our community on a daily basis. The Indian Family Health Clinic reports that they provide services to over 50 different tribes within our area. This clinic is one of only four within our state and people travel from neighboring and distant counties to seek health care here. As you know, there are 7 Indian reservations in the state and 12 federally recognized tribes. In December of this past year, the Little Shell Tribe was also recognized and will add 5,400 individual members to the total count. Historically, census data has disproportionately undercounted this minority population.

The other area of concern that arose from our annual report regarding American Indians and traffic stop data, is the disproportionate amount of citations vs. warnings they receive as compared to the white population. By closely examining this data we identified the top 3 citations issued to American Indians as: No insurance, no Drivers' License, and no registration. We discovered that although these citations

were also issued to white drivers, they were issued more to American Indians. The data suggests that white drivers were more likely to have a valid drivers' license, registration, and insurance when stopped and required to produce these documents. In an effort to put this data into context, we provided our findings to a working group made up of a cross section of people in our community, to include American Indians. Two prominent theories were provided in an effort to explain the results. The first observation highlighted the economic disparity amongst the races and the fact that these required documents for operating a motor vehicle were not a priority amongst this group when other pressing needs were vying for the same financial resources. The second factor to be considered when discussing American Indians is the reality that not all of these documents we deem necessary to operate on the roadways of Montana are required on the reservations. As a people that live on a sovereign nation, they are not required to abide by all the laws of Montana when driving on the roadways within the limits of the reservation. This contrast in what is required when driving on or off the reservation may compound the issue.

We now recognize that using 2010 census data for a bias-based profiling review in our department results in a skewed number and does not accurately reflect the presence of minority groups in Great Falls, especially American Indians, both as residents and as frequent visitors. The annual report for the Great Falls Police Department will be modified in the coming years to more accurately reflect the population of minorities within our community. The source(s) used for the comparisons will be listed and available for the public.

I want to assure you that the Great Falls Police Department is not involved in racial profiling of American Indians within our community. Although the annual report may reflect a higher percentage of contacts with American Indians, I believe that, given the factors described above, it is not an accurate picture of the makeup within our community. That said, we will continue to examine our data collection and analysis methods to make sure we are using up-to-date data and processes to identify and respond to any indicators of bias. In the meantime, we are continuing to build relationships with minority leaders and discuss policing concerns that impact all minority groups.

Chief Bowen