

City of Davis

Independent Police Auditor Report:

Complaint Regarding Alleged Wrongful Detention
of Juvenile

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Independent Police Auditor
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Factual Background

This review began when a mother called the Davis Police Department to report that her daughter, a Black juvenile, had been stopped earlier that same day by officers who apparently suspected she had been shoplifting at a nearby store. The officers had reportedly questioned her and searched her belongings before allowing her to leave without further incident. Per the mother, the daughter was very upset by the experience, and the concern was that she had been subjected to "profiling" or harassment because of her race.

The supervisor with whom the mother initially spoke did some research in an effort to match relevant DPD patrol activity to the incident as described. He was unable to do so, and determined that the store at issue had not reported any shoplifting activity and called the mother back to explain this. The mother was not mollified by this information, and she continued to maintain that DPD officers had stopped her daughter without justification. The supervisor then explained about the mechanics of the complaint process, and the contact ended.

DPD Investigation

The handling investigator took a number of steps in order to find potential corroboration for the mother's third-party account of her teenage daughter's experience. This included visiting the scene of the alleged encounter, speaking with personnel at relevant businesses, and reviewing surveillance recordings. He then conducted a lengthy interview with the young woman herself (as well as her mother and a school district employee who was there to provide support) in an effort to get as many specific details as possible.

Based on the young woman's account, and some of the additional "leads" that emerged from her interview responses, the investigator made further efforts to connect her account to any known officer behavior. (She had provided physical descriptions of the two officers who allegedly detained her, but did not know their names or badge numbers.). This included interviewing the supervisor who had taken the call from the mother – and who (as revealed by surveillance footage) had crossed paths with the young woman as she exited the store and he entered it in order to make a purchase.

While the supervisor's presence at the scene was obviously significant, it turned out that his very brief encounter with the young woman was extraneous to her claims. During her interview, she identified herself in a still photograph from the surveillance video and recalled having seen the supervisor as well. However, she said that he had not been involved in stopping her.

As for the supervisor, he did not have independent recollection of seeing the young woman (or exchanging greetings with her, as she had described) at the store. Importantly, he had also not seen other officers in the vicinity at the time; he explained it would have been routine to approach them had he done so.

The investigator also identified the several officers who were "on shift" at the time of the alleged incident. He was able to use GPS records and other documentation to establish that none of them had been in the area during the relevant time period. Lastly, his attempt to corroborate another aspect of the young woman's story was also unsuccessful: she claimed to have seen one of the involved officers at her school site a few days after the alleged encounter, but there was no record of DPD presence on campus that day.

Ultimately, the Department decided to close the case without making formal findings, in the absence of identified subjects or other evidence of a relevant encounter with DPD personnel.

IPA Analysis

We reviewed the Department's case file for this investigation, which included a memo of the investigative steps that were taken and a transcript of the interview with the young woman and her mother. DPD did several things well here, including an appropriate level of initial responsiveness and a rigorous, thoughtful effort at finding potentially corroborating evidence. We considered the disposition to be an appropriate one.

Allegations of racially biased policing are inherently sensitive, and the thorough and effective handling of them is important to public trust. Our sense is that DPD's investigation of this complaint reflected favorably on its recognition of these concepts.