Nation-Leading Racial Profiling Research Expert Says California RIPA Reports Too Flawed to Be Relied Upon

New Whitepaper Highlights Critical Shortcomings in the Methodology and Data Collection Practices of the California Racial & Identity Profiling Advisory Board

Sacramento, CA — Today, the Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC) released a short whitepaper that reveals foundational flaws in the methodology of racial profiling research employed by the California Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory (RIPA) Board. The paper sheds light on the Board's historic inability to establish causality between any individuals' race or ethnicity and peace officer actions, pointing to critical gaps in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The whitepaper makes clear the data-gaps the RIPA Board must close if they intend their work to be legitimate as a research tool, and not simply confirmation bias of the majority lay-person Board's pre-existing opinions about law enforcement.

In the paper, racial profiling expert Dr. Brian L. Withrow identifies three central challenges that have hindered racial profiling research since its inception, including the RIPA Board's work:

1. **Insufficient Data to Prove Causality:** Existing datasets lack key information, such as whether officers knew an individual's race or ethnicity prior to initiating a stop. This omission prevents researchers from demonstrating a direct causal relationship between race and officer actions.
2. **Lack of a Valid Benchmark:** Researchers have yet to develop a reliable method to estimate the racial or ethnic composition of the driving population. Residential populations are insufficient and are not a reflection of the driving population. Without this baseline, it is impossible to accurately measure disparities in law enforcement stops.
3. **Inability to Eliminate Alternative Explanations:** Elevated stop or arrest rates among certain populations may be influenced by factors unrelated to officer bias, such as the allocation of police resources based on calls for service in specific areas. Alternative explanations must be eliminated before any allegation of racial profiling can be sustained.

While the paper's findings apply broadly across the field of racial profiling research, they have direct implications for the practices of RIPA Board, which is charged with collecting and analyzing law enforcement stop data to identify racial disparities. The Board's existing data collection process accounts for only a portion of what occurs during a traffic stop and does not accurately capture whether an officer could identify an individual's race before initiating a stop nor the context for post-stop decisions like arrests or searches.

"As with their previous reports, the RIPA Board's data collection and evaluation practices remain woefully inadequate to provide the objective data and balanced analysis necessary to accurately assess officer interactions or determine racial profiling," **said Brian R. Marvel, President of the Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC).** "We have been calling out the opportunities for them to improve their

work for years. But there is nothing we can do if they willfully choose to close their eyes and ears to the information that doesn't support their own conclusions."

To address these issues and enable more accurate assessments of bias, the whitepaper outlines several steps to improve racial profiling research:

1. **Enhanced Data Collection**: Expand data collection to include critical information on officers' knowledge of a driver's race at the time the decision to stop was made and provide additional context into post-stop decision-making.
2. **Sophisticated Modelling & Analysis**: Move beyond surface-level comparisons of stop data by race, which obscures the complex factors and policies that guide officer behavior. Instead, utilize statistical models that account for the relative influence of factors like local crime rates, traffic patterns, and individual officer discretion.
3. **Contextualized Policy Approaches**: Balance equity goals with community safety needs to ensure informed and effective decision-making. Acknowledge community-specific needs and local control in law enforcement deployment.

"Until such time as the RIPA Board amends their data collection process to recognize the complexities of routine police operations and refines their analysis to comport with the bare minimum standards for statistical efficacy in racial profiling research, I cannot in good conscience recommend that their work be relied upon in any way," said **Dr. Brian L. Withrow, Professor of Criminal Justice at Texas State University.**

PORAC is deeply committed to accurately assessing biases in policing and has consistently engaged with the RIPA Board to raise these concerns about data collection and analysis. Unfortunately, despite repeated recommendations to resolve these issues, including elevating them directly to the California Department of Justice, PORAC's collaborative efforts have been ignored. The majority layperson Board lacks basic knowledge about law enforcement operations and continues to disregard the fundamental issues in their methodology. For an issue as significant as racial profiling, it is imperative that these ongoing analytical shortcomings are addressed prior to lawmakers relying on the RIPA Board's reports in any way.

"Policymakers and the public deserve better than incomplete data analysis when making decisions that impact community safety and trust in law enforcement," said **Rich Randolph, RIPA Board Member.** "Unfortunately, my colleagues on the Board have repeatedly ignored our requests to capture essential information. I am truly confused as to why the Board insists on undermining their own research by refusing to collect this essential information. Are they afraid that racial profiling isn't as bad as they think it is? You would think they would want to know that before making recommendations to the Legislature."

For additional detail into the shortcomings of the RIPA Board's research process, please review Dr. Withrow's latest whitepaper here: https://porac.org/wp-content/uploads/PORAC-Proving-Racial-Profiling.pdf.

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About the Peace Officers Research Association of California:

The Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC) was incorporated in 1953 as a professional federation of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. PORAC represents over 83,000 public

safety members and over 955 associations, making it the largest law enforcement organization in California and the largest statewide association in the nation.

About Dr. Brian L. Withrow:

Dr. Withrow is one of the nation's leading experts on racial profiling. He has authored three books and numerous articles and reports on this over the past 22 years. As such, he is regularly asked to provide technical and litigation assistance on racial profiling issues to police departments throughout the nation. Dr. Withrow's research methods textbook (Research Methods in Crime and Justice, Second Edition (2016), Routledge Publishing) is used extensively throughout the United States and in other countries. Dr. Withrow joined the Texas State faculty in 2009 and is currently a Professor at Texas State University's School of Criminal Justice and Criminology. Dr. Withrow earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice from Stephen F. Austin State University in 1981, his Master of Public Administration from Southwest Texas State University in 1993, and his Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice from Sam Houston State University in 1999.