

**SNOHOMISH  
COUNTY**

**911**



# Biased Based Calls

Their Impact on Emergency Communications  
and Law Enforcement Response

# Snohomish County Bias Reduction in Emergency Communications (BREC) Workgroup

- Who are we?  
To help prevent and mitigate the issue of bias-based 911 calls, Police TAC has formed a workgroup made up of representatives from all levels of SNO911 and member agency personnel, the Bias Reduction in Emergency Communications (BREC) Workgroup.
- BREC's Mission Statement is:  
*"Create a dialogue and a group, within Snohomish County, that identifies strategies and tactics to eliminate or reduce the impact of bias-based 911 calls, by developing policies and training, and creating a culture of individual empowerment."*

# For general discussion, this can be broken down into two types of calls:

- **Bias Based Call** - where a caller's known or unknown bias has motivated them to call 911 because they are not comfortable with an individual based on perceived differences and not behavior.
  - Can be an issues of Race, Color, Religion, Economic Status, Gender, or any difference that makes the caller uncomfortable based on appearance and not the actual behavior or actions observed.
- **"Racialized Police Communication"** - Where a caller's prejudice is the motivation to "leverage law enforcement" for the mistreatment of an individual.
  - Weaponizing 911 and law enforcement to negatively impact an individual or groups freedom, movement, or quality of life.
  - *A person knowingly called the police on another person, with the intent to infringe on their constitutional rights; unlawfully discriminate against them; cause them to feel harassed, humiliated or embarrassed; cause them to be expelled from somewhere they have a right to be; or damage their reputation or economic interests. (Oregon HB 3216 -2019)*

# Examples

## Bias based Calls:

- National example: July 2009, Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard Professor Henry Gates, an African American Professor of Humanities is arrested while trying to enter his own home after a trip overseas. Many may remember that this led to the “Beer Summit” with President Obama.



- Local Example - 12/20/2020 - Snohomish

# Examples

## Racialized Police Communication:

- National Example: July 2020, New York Central Park. While walking her dog off leash, Amy Cooper was confronted by Christian Cooper, an African American bird watcher, who asked Amy to put her dog on a leash, which is required by law. Amy responded by stating *“I’m calling the cops ... I’m gonna tell them there’s an African American man threatening my life.”* Christian’s cell phone video of the incident went viral. Amy lost her job and is facing criminal charges as a result of this incident.



- Local Example - 2/22/2021 - Arlington

# What we are doing in Snohomish County

## BREC work:

- Gathering data and local examples
- Officer/Deputy awareness of Priming
  - *Flyer (excerpt on next slides)*
- Policy
  - Researching, updating and developing internal policies for SNO911
  - Potentially developing examples of “Best Practices” for consideration by local Law Enforcement agencies.
- Training
  - Developing training for Call Takers and Dispatchers to:
    - Recognize when a call may be a biased-based call
    - Appropriate interaction with the caller when a biased-based call is suspected
    - Communicating that suspicion with Officers & Deputies without Priming them for inaction
    - Developing potential Officer / Deputy training

# 911-Based Priming

Priming can occur when a 911 caller makes a report that ends up being racially or other bias motivated. This information, as gathered and relayed, may shape, or prime, the way law enforcement respond to the call. This bias-based motivation may or may not result in negative consequences.



# If You Have Experienced a Bias-Based Call:

The Bias Reduction in Emergency Communications (BREC) Workgroup is interested in reviewing examples of calls where the 911 call was impacted by implicit bias or otherwise racially motivated. If you have experienced a call, please send the details to Karen McKay – [kcmckay@sno911.org](mailto:kcmckay@sno911.org)



## Have you been Primed?

# BREC Work Continued...

## ➤ Technology

- Researching possible technology solutions that would aid SNO911 in communicating / flagging such calls to officers & deputies
- Technology that would flag suspected bias-based calls for further follow up, research, and statistical analysis

## ➤ Public awareness / education

- “Next Step Thinking” How do we use what we have learned to create greater public awareness?
  - Provide awareness and education that results in voluntary intervention on bias-based calls.
  - Information may support statewide legislative efforts to address individuals who knowingly called the police on another person:
    - With the intent to infringe on their constitutional rights;
    - Unlawfully discriminate against them;
    - Cause them to feel harassed, humiliated or embarrassed;
    - Cause them to be expelled from somewhere they have a right to be;
    - Damage their reputation or economic interests

# What's being done regionally, nationally?

- Research is being done:
  - Several academic institutions are now researching this phenomena
  - Numerous academic papers and thesis have been written and published on this issue
- Laws are being passed
  - Virginia has a new law (March 2021) that makes such a call a criminal offense; a class 6 felony.
  - Washington (SB 5135), Oregon, Wisconsin, New York, and other states either have or are considering laws that would make it easier for the victim of such a call to “... have a civil cause of action...” against the caller.
- Other 911 centers are talking, thinking, some are acting...