



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of the Report of the *Public Safety Proposal Advisory Committee* on the Department of Public Safety's "Proposed Evolution of the Armed Peace Officer Program"

March 29, 2019

1. Introduction

In December, 2018, the University of Rochester formed the Public Safety Proposal Advisory Committee (hereafter "the Committee") and charged it with providing advice to the Public Safety Review Board (PSRB) and to President Feldman regarding the Department of Public Safety's "[Proposed Evolution of the Armed Peace Officer Program](#)" (hereafter "the proposal"). With 27 members, including students, faculty and staff from all parts of the university (River Campus, Eastman, URMC) as well as a resident from the neighboring community, the Committee worked both as a whole and in sub-committees over the past two months to study issues relevant to the proposal and to perform outreach activities to gather the widest possible variety of perspectives on it from stakeholders across the university and in the broader community, as well as from the Department of Public Safety (DPS) itself.

At the heart of this inquiry are questions about how the notion of *safety* should ultimately be understood, how it can best be achieved for everyone, and how to strike an appropriate balance between the pursuit of increased safety and the honoring of other values integral to the University of Rochester and its mission of learning, discovery, healing, and creative work in a campus environment situated within a broader urban community. Measures that may increase safety in some respects or for some people might decrease it in other respects or for other people, and measures perceived by some to increase overall safety might be perceived by others as threatening and alienating. Steps that might increase safety in connection with one potential dangerous scenario might at the same time carry risks in connection with many other, more likely scenarios, and impose costs with respect to other values associated with campus climate and the way in which life at the university is experienced for many in our community. After carefully exploring these issues and gathering diverse perspectives on them, the Committee set about reconstructing both the strongest arguments in favor of the proposal and the strongest arguments against it. We then worked to assess those arguments to determine which are the most compelling *all-things-considered*. This is discussed at length in the report.

While the Committee did not reach unanimity on recommendations concerning the proposal, we did reach a **substantial consensus of over 80%** on recommendations for each part of it. The report breaks down the proposal into (i) the elements concerning the deployment of armed officers in areas that do not currently have armed patrols, and (ii) the element concerning the provision of unrestricted access to all parts of campus for armed *supervisors* for certain *very limited, specified purposes*. We provide both a *majority report* and a *minority report* for each of these aspects of the proposal, noting the number of Committee members who endorsed each and explaining their rationales for their position. This takes up most of the report, in section IV.A. In addition, the Committee as a whole developed a set of further recommendations pertaining to safety and community for the university to consider regardless of what decision is ultimately made on the current proposal. These are in section IV.B of the report and we urge all to consider these carefully. There are also two appendices summarizing the work of two of our sub-committees (section V). We have additionally made numerous supporting materials available to the PSRB and to President Feldman, such as the many letters and online comments we received, detailed minutes of Committee meetings, reports and articles we read and discussed, and other materials that were shared with us.

2. [The DPS Proposal Under Consideration:](#)

The DPS proposal under consideration has *four* elements, involving:

- Deploying one armed officer per shift (in a mobile unit) to the River Campus;
- Deploying one armed officer per shift (in a mobile unit) to the Riverview/Brooks Campus;
- Deploying one armed officer per shift (on foot patrol) to the Downtown/Eastman Campus;
- Granting armed supervisors unrestricted access to all campuses for certain limited purposes.

3. Committee Recommendations on the Proposal

Out of 27 Total Committee Members:

- **22 Committee Members** recommend **rejecting** *all three elements of the proposal involving the arming of patrols in areas that do not currently have armed patrols* (River Campus, Riverview/Brooks, Eastman).
- **22 Committee Members** recommend **adopting** the remaining element of the proposal granting armed supervisors unrestricted access to campus for certain very limited purposes (*not* regular patrols).
- **5 Committee Members** recommend instead **rejecting** even the element of the proposal granting armed supervisors unrestricted access to campus for limited purposes.
- **5 Committee Members** recommend **adopting** the proposal in its entirety.

Rationales: It is important to understand that the proposal would involve a major change in policy regarding armed response. Currently, armed responses (outside of URM and SMH) occur only where there is a report of a firearm or threatened use of any other weapon (or, for supervisors, also in cases involving imminent threats to health and safety). If the proposal were adopted, however, newly armed peace officers patrolling the River Campus, Riverview/Brooks, and Eastman would be responding to *any* calls for which they were the closest officers. This means that people would be newly exposed to regular armed policing on campus, with an estimated 3,899 responses by armed officers each year on the River Campus alone. Such changes are extremely salient to many students, faculty, staff and neighboring residents who are deeply alarmed by this proposed new exposure to regular armed policing throughout the University.

The majority of the Committee (22/27) who reject any newly armed patrols do not deny that *all else being equal*, decreased response times in cases truly requiring armed response would be desirable (and similarly with the other advantages cited in the proposal). The problem, however, is that *not* all else *is* equal: there are in fact major costs and risks introduced by the increased arming and new exposure to routine armed policing—costs and risks disproportionately borne by people of color and members of other vulnerable groups. When these are properly considered, along with relevant probabilities, the majority position is that the costs and risks outweigh the benefits of increased arming. There are many such costs and risks to consider, both objective (e.g., risks of deadly mistakes stemming from mistaking a cell phone for a gun, exacerbated by implicit bias) and subjective (e.g., the undermining of many people’s sense of safety and social well-being through such exposure to armed policing even on campus). When considerations of *timing* are added, given the current profound resistance to taking on these added risks and costs, and the fact that little of relevance has changed since the 2016 Security Commission *rejected* increased arming across campus, the majority finds the case against the current rushed process to increase arming of campus security to be especially decisive: this is plainly not a change the UR and wider community are ready for. These issues are explored at length in sections 1a and 1b of the recommendations section of the report, with the majority concluding that there are better ways to address safety issues and promote well-being for all than to add lethal force to existing patrols.

The minority of the Committee (5/27) who instead recommend full adoption of the proposal acknowledge some of the above risks and costs but place much less weight on them or argue that trust-building steps, undertaken concurrently with adopting the proposal, would be sufficient to mitigate them. They emphasize their trust in DPS and the training officers receive, concerns about violent crime in Rochester, worries about the prospect of an active shooter and the benefits of decreased armed response times in such cases and the ability of DPS officers (with the best training and better knowledge of the campus than RPD) to take the lead in armed responses—reiterating the points made in DPS’s case for the proposal. They also argue that the current powerful opposition to armed policing on campus would likely pass in a few years, as new students come in who will mostly not even know whether or not DPS officers are armed (most probably just assuming that they are, as many currently did before this issue was publicly raised and debated). This is discussed in sections 2a and 2b of the recommendations section of the report

A majority (22/27) agrees that it makes sense to allow supervisors the access they need to campus to perform their supervisory tasks and attend relevant meetings or events even if they are armed, given that best practices do not allow for officers once armed to function sometimes with arms and sometimes without them. Apart from the 5 above who endorse adopting the whole proposal, however, the rest insist that this expanded access for supervisors is for very limited purposes only, as spelled out in section 1c. A different group of 5 members instead rejects even this part of the proposal, arguing that there should be other ways for supervisors to carry out their supervisory roles or attend meetings, perhaps by having fewer armed supervisors or getting special dispensations to attend meetings when necessary (see section 1d). This group emphasizes the obstacles that any armed presence poses for building community relations and trust, and calls for a reframing of future discussions of safety to place greater emphasis on larger issues of social justice rather than having the discussion default to questions about increasing arming or armed presence.