

DPS reviewing weekend incident involving pointing of officer's gun

Social media has carried accounts of a police interaction with an individual on the Stanford campus over the weekend. To keep our community informed, this message provides information about the matter and how it is being reviewed.

Leadership of the Stanford Department of Public Safety (DPS) are reviewing an incident on Saturday night, Jan. 28, in which an officer unholstered his gun and pointed it at a car, driven by a Black individual, that had been stopped due to an outstanding arrest warrant for the owner of the car. The review, which is standard practice, seeks to determine if the actions of officers indicate any policy or law violations, and whether the incident indicates any additional training needs to be conducted.

In addition to the DPS review:

- DPS has asked the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office, which has oversight responsibility for the sworn officers who work at Stanford, to review the incident.
- Information about the incident also will be shared with the university's Community Board on Public Safety, a separate body of representatives from the university community that is engaged in a process of reviewing and making recommendations on campus public safety policies and protocols.

Below are the facts as DPS understands them currently, in an effort to share the available information in a timely manner:

On Jan. 28 at approximately 10:47 p.m., a Stanford deputy on routine patrol noticed a car, parked in the parking lot of a student residence, that had a pile of discarded trash adjacent to it. The deputy could not see into the vehicle, which had tinted windows. He illuminated the car and saw a person reclined in the front seat. The deputy approached the car and had a brief interaction with the person, during which time the deputy noticed a number of delivery packages in the back seat. The driver explained he was a delivery driver, asked if he was free to leave, and drove away. The deputy, prompted by recent concerns about package thefts on campus, and not seeing any indicia that the driver or the vehicle were associated with the delivery company, asked dispatchers to run the license plate number of the vehicle.

That request returned information that there was an arrest warrant for DUI for the registered owner of the vehicle and that the registered owner had suspended driving privileges in California. A short time later, a second deputy stopped the vehicle on campus, near the Escondido Village Graduate Residences. A third deputy joined the second deputy at the site of the stop, and then the first deputy joined them.

The officer who initiated the stop directed the driver to exit the vehicle and walk back to the officers. When the driver did not comply with the directions to exit the vehicle, another deputy

unholstered his gun and pointed it in the direction of the vehicle. The driver was seated in the car and the officer was positioned behind a patrol car. Another deputy, who had the initial interaction with the driver, also unholstered his firearm but kept it by his side and did not point it at the vehicle or the driver. Ultimately, the driver exited the car, the deputies holstered their weapons, the driver was placed in handcuffs and then placed into the back of a patrol car.

Further investigation then determined that the driver was not the registered owner of the car. The driver was cited for an infraction (possession of marijuana in an unsealed container in the compartment of a moving vehicle) and released from the scene.

Several police vehicles ultimately responded to the scene. A fourth DPS officer responded, as did the DPS supervisor, in order to provide traffic control in the area. Palo Alto Police also responded. They arrived after the driver had been detained and was already seated in a patrol car. The DPS deputies notified PAPD that their assistance was not needed, and they left immediately.

“DPS personnel are keenly aware of the concerns community members have about policing in the United States,” said Laura Wilson, director of the Department of Public Safety. “We understand the level of distrust many persons have about the police, especially persons of color. The recent tragic death of Tyre Nichols at the hands of persons who were police officers emphasizes why distrust is warranted. The actions of those officers do not reflect the values and principles that DPS personnel endeavor to uphold.

“DPS personnel are committed to ethical policing and intend to continue working with the community to create an environment in which all persons feel valued and respected. Clearly, there is a great deal of work and healing that needs to occur so that we can achieve better outcomes for everyone, and to ensure that everyone in our community feels safe on campus. We will be keeping the Community Board on Public Safety informed about the reviews of this incident as part of our effort to facilitate that.”