Denver auditor, police department disagree over whether officers working to end racial profiling

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POSTED: 4:00 PM, Sep 28, 2017
UPDATED: 6:49 PM, Sep 28, 2017
TAG: denver police department | denver auditor | denver auditor timothy o'brien | denver police deputy chief matt murray | dpd racial profiling audit

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It said O'Brien’s recommendation that DPD do an annual assessment of the collected demographic data, and recommendations that officers collect data for all contact with pedestrians and traffic stops, was unnecessary.

But O'Brien noted Thursday after releasing his follow-up to the original audit that officers only collect that data if the contact leads to a citation, arrest or street check. He said that since DPD wasn’t using the CP-SAT method, it means DPD isn’t following his recommendation.

“We cannot assess whether either survey met the spirit of or captured content similar to the CP-SAT survey,” the follow-up report to the audit said. “As a result, we consider this recommendation as having not been implemented.”

But DPD Deputy Chief Matt Murray pushed back against the auditor’s office Thursday.

“The auditor is just misinformed. He just made an error here.” Murray said. “There’s a lot of things we’re doing that he clearly just isn’t aware of.”

Murray says DPD has indeed started a “data collection initiative,” which he says is a group that includes the independent monitor and community organizations, and which he says meets...
once a week.

He says that the department has been working with the Center for Policing Equity on a memorandum of understanding to start transferring data.

“We will begin transferring data, and we are working on a mechanism for officers to collect data...so there can be analysis about this very issue,” Murray said.

He said data collection during street encounters can prove difficult for officers at times because the citizens clam up when they are asked certain questions.

“There’s technology challenges. There’s challenges about intrusion and we don’t want to ask every person we talk to...I don’t want to ask their ethnicity, their sexual orientation, their age,” Murray said. “We’re trying to develop a great relationship with the community, and that would actually be chilling for many folks. So we have to have a balance between enforcement...and also being too intrusive.”

He added that the Center for Policing Equity told the department they’d need a year’s worth of data before they can start doing comparisons, and that the department would start sending the center data “probably within the next month.”

And he said that whatever the center reports back to the department will be considered.

“We’re always willing to change, that’s why we’ve been involved in all of these initiatives from the get-go,” Murray said. “We work for the community and we hear them, and we absolutely want to be ahead of this. We don’t want to be one of the police departments that people see on TV because we’re not addressing these issues.”

But O’Brien pushed back as well.

“I’m an auditor. I work with facts, not with statements,” he said. “There is a self-assessment tool that is available to the police department. They did not seem to want to use that tool,” he said. “I don’t have a solution for them on how to do it, but to have a policy without the data to support whether you’re complying with the policy or not complying...is an empty policy.”