

STATEMENT ON STOP-and-FRISK
presented to Common Council
by
Rev. Roy Allen, Chairman of
Police-Community Relations Committee

The CCR wishes to record its opposition to the proposed Stop-and-Frisk Law. The concern of the CCR is to seek equal justice before the law for all men. We have consistently asserted that law, rights, and responsibilities must apply equally to individuals. Group rights or obligations have no standing in the American system of justice. This has led the CCR to consistently oppose laws which would tend to place a greater burden on any one race or group.

We see the proposed Stop-and-Frisk Law as being an unequal burden to inner-city residents, especially to the Negro and the poor in the inner city. It is not unreasonable to expect that the white citizens on the fringes of the city who will be "stopped and frisked" will be few in number, compared to inner-city Negroes. This means that the practical application of this law will be aimed at inner-city residents.

The substantial impact of this law, like the Police crackdown policy of 1960, will be to defame whole segments of our city and groups of people based on the place of residence or their color. The inaccuracy and distortion of crime statistics in this and in the national community is a notorious fact, scandalous in its implications. The emotionality that flows from these crime statistics and the implication of group guilt applying to racial groups is unconscionable.

In our own community the experience of the last two Police Commissioners demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of citizens, white and Negro alike, are law abiding and supportive of all relevant measures to control crime. The proposed "Stop-and-Frisk" law would give emotional and legal support to the differential application that can only produce further aggravations and hostilities between citizens and police officers.

The 1967 Task Force Report on the President's Commission on Law Enforcement said: "Misuse of field interrogation is causing serious friction with minority groups in many localities. This is becoming particularly true as more police departments adopt 'aggressive patrol' in which officers are encouraged routinely to stop and question persons on the street who are unknown to them, who are suspicious, or whose purpose for being abroad is not readily evident."

It is no secret that the relationship between the Negro community and the Police Department at the present is not especially friendly. The sensitivity among Negroes to the way law enforcement has been administered in their neighborhoods cannot but lead to their seeing this law as an instrument of the white community aimed chiefly at them. It may be argued that if a man has done nothing

wrong he has nothing to fear. This may be true but it is only part of the truth. The other part is the anger generated by the public shame endured by innocent individuals when stopped on the street by the police and searched.

The proposed law concludes with the admonishment that "the individual police officer will take special care not only to honor the rights of citizens as defined by the U. S. Constitution but also to safeguard the personal dignity of all those affected by it." The large number of innocent Negroes who will be subjected to public embarrassment will surely give the impression that these words were not meant for them. Considering the tenuous relationship between the police and the Negro community, such a law will do more harm to racial harmony than it will accomplish in crime prevention.

In present practice policemen already have adequate grounds for searching individuals for weapons.

Last summer's disturbances in cities around the country have caused a wave of fear at the approach of the summer of "68". It is a difficult thing to act with calm reason in an atmosphere of fear; but this is the difficult task confronted by this body -- to seek with calm deliberation to correct the underlying social problems that cause the disorders in our cities.