

STATEMENT BEFORE DETROIT COMMON COUNCIL  
Re: Proposed Crime Control Ordinance  
February 28, 1968

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My name is Sidney Shevitz. I speak as a life-long resident of Detroit and as Co-Chairman and on behalf of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. We do not believe that the Detroit Common Council should enact a stop and frisk ordinance.

Aside from the doubtful constitutionality of such a proposal, - awaiting determination by the U.S. Supreme Court, - we have been assured by various authorities, including our State Police, that it is unnecessary and that our police already have this power. Whether they have it or not they have in fact been exercising it.

From reports and allegations that have come to our attention, many in the black community, including school children and their parents, feel that this power has been misused by some members of our police force. Whether the extent of such misuse is great or negligible is less important than the fact that enough people believe it to be substantial. This belief increases racial tensions in our community. To enact unnecessary stop and frisk legislation would serve to aggravate these tensions. For it would be perceived by many as an attempt to legitimize practices designed less to apprehend criminals than to harass, intimidate and treat with indignity law abiding citizens.

If our civilization is to survive we must have law and order. But we cannot and will not have law and order without an equal concern and devotion to law and justice.

We deplore the prevalence of a feeling of the inevitability of riots and conflict. We deplore the growing inclination of extremists -- black or white -- who seem to be "itching" for a violent confrontation. We deplore the tendency of those government officials who react to these serious problems with only responses of containment and repression.

We believe that agencies of government -- local, state and Federal -- including those involved in law enforcement -- must be charged with a degree of responsibility that does not permit them to act out of anger or prejudice that may characterize the ordinary citizen.

Government agencies must not only be concerned with crime, but also with its causes, with discrimination and inequality, with poverty and the lack of opportunity to live in dignity, with the deprivation and denial of human and civil rights. Our concern must move us not only to articulate the principles of equality of citizenship as provided in our Constitution, but to devise and adopt realistic programs to make them come true.

If we do this we may not have to consider such ordinances whether we call them stop and frisk or crime control proposals. We will still have to assert our concern for law and order. But we will not have alienated and we will have the assurance of the confidence, support and cooperation of the majority of our community -- black and white -- for the achievement of a peaceful and just society.