

2025

Policing Policy Brief

What's
Happening and
Why It Matters

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In collaboration with



Urban
Strategies
Inc.

About 904WARD

904WARD began in 2015 with a small group of friends who came together to talk openly, challenge each other, support each other, and take action together to build a more inclusive Jacksonville.

We are a diverse group made up of people committed to creating a community of inclusion for all. We take pride in mobilizing thousands of volunteers every year to create racial healing and equity.

An inclusive community begins with understanding each other better.



Mission: 904WARD creates racial healing and equity through deep conversations and learning, trusting relationships, and collective action.

Vision: An end to racism in Jacksonville and beyond so all people thrive.

Police Transparency and Community Trust

How a Jacksonville Case Renewed Calls for Accountability

Executive Summary

The case involving Jacksonville resident William McNeil renewed public discussion about police transparency, investigative clarity, and public trust in law enforcement processes. Concerns raised by community members were not rooted in opposition to policing, but in questions about how information is shared following serious use-of-force incidents and how accountability mechanisms function within existing legal frameworks.

Jacksonville, like many large cities, relies on law enforcement officers to protect public safety under challenging circumstances. Maintaining public confidence in those institutions is essential for effective policing, crime prevention, and community cooperation. Transparency, when applied responsibly and consistently, can reinforce legitimacy, reduce misinformation, and protect both officers and civilians.

This policy brief examines the McNeil case as a catalyst for renewed public scrutiny, places it within the context of prior high-profile incidents, and outlines why transparency is a practical tool for public safety, fiscal responsibility, and institutional trust. It also addresses common misconceptions surrounding police interactions and proposes policy approaches that balance officer safety, due process, and public accountability.

The Case of William McNeil

William McNeil, a Jacksonville resident who was seriously injured during a police encounter, prompted community concern regarding the timing and clarity of information released to the public. According to the investigative report, Mr. McNeil was arrested on February 19, 2025. Bodycam footage of the incident was shared 152 days after his arrest. “In Columbus, Ohio it took five hours. In North Carolina, it requires a court order. In New York City, police can wait up to a month, sometimes longer. According to criminal justice professor, Geoffrey Alpert, from the University of South Carolina, the release of body cam footage is “all over the board. It has to do with state laws. A lot of it has to do with previous litigation” ([Spectrum News, 2021](#)).

Some residents and civic organizations expressed frustration with delays in body-worn camera footage and limited public explanation of investigative steps. Delays in communication following serious incidents can create several challenges:

- Reduced public confidence in law enforcement processes
- Increased speculation and misinformation
- Public demonstrations driven by uncertainty rather than verified facts
- Confusion about how internal investigations and disciplinary decisions are conducted



This is not a new trend in any level of law enforcement work. Delaying sharing information about police officer incidents where a resident is harmed has several negative impacts on the community



While such delays are not unique to Jacksonville, the McNeil case highlighted the need for clearer standards and communication protocols when serious injuries occur during police encounters.

Key transparency challenges identified include:

- Florida Statute 943.1740, passed in 2021, establishes standards and reporting requirements for law enforcement use-of-force incidents that result in death or firearm-related injury or death. However, Florida law does not set a standardized release timeline or create a uniform statewide requirement for investigating or publicly reporting non-fatal serious-injury cases
- Limited civilian insight into review processes: Current oversight structures prioritize internal review, which some residents view as insufficiently transparent.
- Restricted public reporting of outcomes: Investigative conclusions and disciplinary actions are often summarized without detailed public explanation, contributing to uncertainty.

The McNeil case became a focal point not because it was unprecedented, but because it reflected ongoing questions about consistency, communication, and accountability.

What Sets Jacksonville Apart

Compared to other large U.S. cities, Jacksonville lacks several commonly used transparency tools:

- A civilian oversight mechanism with meaningful community participation and visibility*
- Standardized public reporting on use-of-force incidents
- Public-facing disciplinary data that includes civilian complaints and resolution outcomes

**Recent Florida legislation (HB 601) reshaped civilian oversight options by limiting independent review boards while allowing sheriff-controlled civilian advisory bodies. While supporters argue this structure protects due process and operational integrity, critics note it reduces independent public input.*

Jacksonville has seen multiple incidents, ranging from officer-involved shootings to serious injury traffic stops and mental health crises, where residents requested body-camera footage and clearer explanations of investigative outcomes. In the absence of consistent transparency practices, perceptions of secrecy can grow and trust can erode across generations.

Why Transparency Matters

Transparency is not a political issue. It is a public-safety strategy.



Strengthening Community Trust

Residents are more likely to cooperate with law enforcement, report crimes, and serve as witnesses when they believe processes are fair, predictable, and clearly explained. Trust allows officers to do their jobs more effectively and safely.

Improving Public Safety Outcomes

Clear communication reduces speculation, prevents misinformation, and lowers the risk of community unrest. Transparency helps maintain order while investigations proceed.

Fiscal and Legal Responsibility

Clear standards and public accountability reduce the likelihood of costly civil litigation, prolonged investigations, and strained municipal budgets. These savings allow cities to invest more in crime prevention, youth programs, and community-based safety initiatives.

Addressing Common Misconceptions

Misinformation surrounding police encounters often undermines productive dialogue.

Myth 1: Most incidents escalate solely due to civilian behavior

Reality: Outcomes are influenced by multiple factors, including training, decision-making, and situational stress.

Myth 2: Transparency puts officers at greater risk

Reality: Transparency protects officers by establishing factual records, reducing false narratives, and reinforcing public confidence.

Myth 3: Distrust of police is irrational or politically motivated

Reality: Distrust often stems from past experiences and unclear processes, not hostility toward law enforcement itself.

*Correcting misinformation supports evidence-based
policymaking and constructive reform*



What You Can Do!

Practical Steps Forward For Community Members

- Attend public safety and City Council meetings
- Submit public comment on transparency policies
- Participate in community forums focused on public safety
- Support lawful, civic engagement

For Civic & Nonprofit Organizations

- Promote education on policing policies and procedures
- Facilitate data transparency initiatives
- Offer legal and informational resources to community members
- Partner with mental health, victims advocacy and youth organizations

For Policymakers

- Establish clear, statewide timelines for body-camera footage release in serious injury cases
- Require standardized public reporting on use-of-force incidents
- Clarify investigative communication protocols
- Ensure transparency measures protect officer due process

Conclusion

Police transparency is not about weakening law enforcement; it is about strengthening legitimacy, improving safety, and maintaining public trust. The William McNeil case underscores the importance of clear standards, consistent communication, and accountable processes.

Effective policing depends on cooperation between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Transparency, when implemented responsibly, supports officer safety, fiscal stewardship, and public confidence; core principles shared across political lines.



Further Reading

Policing Policies under Governor DeSantis

SB 184 (2024) “Impeding, Threatening, or Harassing First Responders”

Creates a new criminal provision prohibiting a person who, after receiving a verbal warning, approaches or remains within a specified distance of a first responder (including police) with intent to harass, threaten, or interfere. Violations are misdemeanors and the law establishes a 25-foot “no-approach” rule after a warning.

Effective: Jan 1, 2025

Impact: Criminalizes certain approaches/behaviors near officers during their duties and gives officers a statutory tool to disperse/charge interfering bystanders. Supporters believe it offers protection for responders on the scene.

Source: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2024/184/BillText/er/PDF>
<https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2024/governor-desantis-signs-legislation-protect-floridas-law-enforcement-officers>

HB 601 (2024) Civilian Oversight / Law Enforcement & Correctional Officers

Authorizes sheriffs and police chiefs to establish civilian oversight boards but places structural and appointment controls on those boards (for example, boards composed of members appointed by the sheriff/chief, boards must include a retired law-enforcement officer, limited jurisdiction to review policies/procedures rather than individual officer investigations). The law also prohibits local governments from adopting certain ordinances that would impose alternative complaint/investigation requirements. It also revises sheriffs’ base salaries.

Effective: 2024 session (signed by Governor DeSantis).

Impact: Expands an option for local oversight while limiting independent/local-initiated oversight models, centers control of oversight appointments with police executives.

Sources: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2024/601/ByCategory>
<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2024/601/Analyses/h0601z1.CRJ.PDF>
<https://legiscan.com/FL/bill/H0601/2024>

HB 1047 Increased penalties for harming police K-9s / horses and related protections Raises criminal penalties for intentionally injuring or killing law enforcement animals (for example, from misdemeanor to felony for certain acts) and increases penalties for interfering with police animals while they perform duties. It also amends statutes related to resisting officers in some contexts.

Effective: 2023 (signed into law).

Impact: Stronger statutory protections for law enforcement animals and tougher criminal exposure to offenders. Often framed as targeted public-safety enhancements.

Sources: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/1047/Analyses/h1047z1.CRJ.PDF>
<https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2023/governor-ron-desantis-signs-legislation-increase-criminal-penalties-crimes>

HB 3 (2022) Law Enforcement Recruitment & Support Initiative

A broad package to recruit and retain officers: signing bonuses (up to \$5,000), relocation assistance for certified officers, reimbursement for certain training/certification costs, and other benefits (for example, assistance programs and scholarships for children of officers). Florida also created a state bonus program to distribute these incentives.

Effective: 2022 (signed by Governor DeSantis).

Impact: Intended to boost staffing and attract officers from elsewhere; Florida reports thousands of recruits and millions distributed in bonuses. Supporters say it helps address staffing shortages.

Sources: <https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2022/governor-desantis-signs-hb-3-strongest-law-enforcement-recruitment-and-support>
<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/3/Analyses/h0003e.JDC.PDF>
<https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2025/governor-ron-desantis-awards-bonuses-law-enforcement-recruits-reaching-8700-total>

Concern #1: Non-criminals are being targeted, even at a local level.

- Being undocumented is a civil violation, not a crime. Yet Jacksonville city lawmakers voted 12 to 5 to make illegal Policing a local crime, requiring mandatory jail sentences of up to 60 days and local law enforcement to notify federal authorities.
- Racial profiling of Latino people is increasing as are attempts to make racial profiling legal.
- Dehumanizing terms like “illegals” and “invasion” create a framework that justifies more aggressive enforcement tactics against individuals who have committed no crimes.

Concern #2: Police-ICE partnerships undermine community safety.

When police act as deportation agents:

- Immigrants stop reporting crimes, especially crimes like robbery and sexual assault. When police are called, they often arrest and deport the victim and do not address the crime.
- Communities lose trust in law enforcement.
- Criminals target immigrants, knowing they are less likely to call the police.

This makes communities less safe and immigrants easy targets for criminal activity.

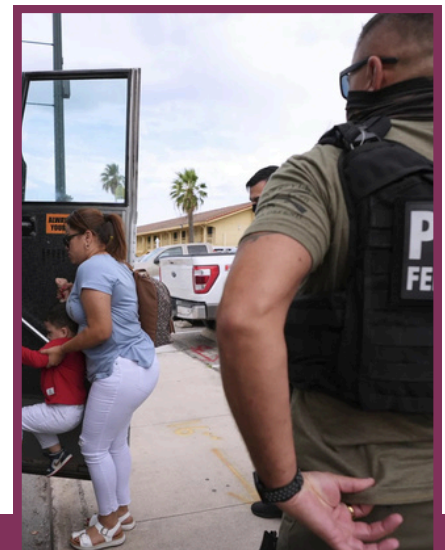
Concern #3: Constitutional rights are being violated.

- Due process is being violated when deportations occur without court hearings.
- People following the legal process are being arrested at citizenship hearings after denial.
- Detainees are being moved between facilities without legal access or family notification.
- Masked agents are making arrests without properly identifying themselves, creating easy opportunities for imposters and the inability to report misconduct.

Concern #4: Immigrants are being detained in inhumane conditions.

- Florida detention centers are severely overcrowded with inadequate food and medicine.
- Reports of worms in food, broken toilets flooding with fecal waste, mosquito infestation, and 24/7 lights have come from “Alligator Alcatraz,” a facility without permanent structures, electricity or running water.
- People can be removed from the country within 24 hours and deported to countries that are not their country of origin or conflict zones like South Sudan.

These practices represent a systematic abandonment of humanitarian standards and basic human rights protections.



Why This Matters: Seven Key Concerns

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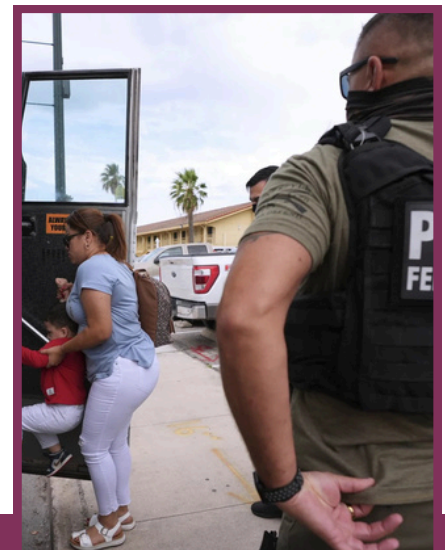
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Concern #5: Public health and safety are at risk.

ICE enforcement in hospitals and schools creates dangerous ripple effects:

- Immigrants avoid medical care, allowing diseases to spread.
- School attendance is significantly down in communities with high immigrant populations.
- As people avoid involving medical personnel, emergency situations become more dangerous for everyone.

When enforcement actions occur in these locations, it creates fear that undermines their ability to serve their fundamental purposes, ultimately making entire communities less safe and healthy.

Concern #6: Disregard of legal precedence creates significant legal challenges.

- Denying birthright citizenship denies a constitutional right.
- Denying citizenship to people born in the United States has the ability to create “stateless” individuals who have no country to claim.
- An estimated 1.4 people are slated to lose their Temporary Protected Status, a status granted to people from certain countries whose personal security is potentially threatened by deporting them to their country of origin.

These changes pose serious threats to the lives of those impacted. People may be deported back to their home country, a decision administered arbitrarily without sufficient evidence or explanation of why the conditions in those countries are now deemed safe. Likewise, people without a country creates a perpetual cycle of marginalization and vulnerability with significant social, legal, and economic consequences.

Concern #7: Absence of immigrant contributions hurts our communities, society, and economy.

- The construction industry is facing a 500,000 worker shortage this year.
- Food prices are expected to rise 14.5% due to farm labor shortages.
- \$167 billion in rent revenue and \$6.6 trillion in immigrant housing wealth is at risk.
- We are also facing a loss of innovation and entrepreneurship as 46% of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children.

Most importantly, immigrants contribute to the cultural diversity, global competitiveness, innovation and social cohesion that broaden our cultural lens, push business development, and make neighborhoods more vibrant and engaging.