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Police Stops on City Streets Rose Significantly Last Year

A suit calls the stops unconstitutional; the police say they reflect where crime happens.

By AL BAKER

New York City police officers stopped more than half a million people on the streets last year, more than in any previous 12-month period in the years since the Police Department began releasing the data.

The 531,159 stops made last year, up from 468,992 in 2007, led to 31,665 arrests and 34,081 summonses, a ratio of stops to arrests roughly equal to 2007, according to an analysis of the data by the New York Civil Liberties Union. The numbers, which were released to the City Council on Friday, show that roughly 88 percent of those stopped in 2008 of the past two years had done nothing wrong, said Christopher T. Dunn, the associate legal director of the civil liberties group.

According to Mr. Dunn, the new numbers show that in 2008, 51.1 percent of the people stopped were black, 31.5 percent were Hispanic and 10.5 percent white. He pointed out that police offi-

cials are facing deep budget cuts and a reduced force because of the trimming of Police Academy classes this year and next.

"At a time when police services are being cut back, one would think the department would have better things to do than to stop and frisk hundreds of thousands of black and Latino New Yorkers who have done nothing wrong," Mr. Dunn said on Tuesday. "This is an area where less policing would actually be better for the city."

The Center for Constitutional Rights sued the city in federal court in January 2008, charging that it has a policy of conducting unconstitutional stop-and-frisks and singles out ethnic minorities, said Darius Charney, a lawyer for the group. The suit is pending.

Police officials must divulge the numbers under a law enacted in 2001 in the aftermath of the fatal police shooting of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed African immigrant, in 1999.

Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly has said that his officers do not practice racial profiling in making the street stops — not all of which lead to frisks. The police have said that while a large percentage of the stops involve black people, an even larger percentage of crimes involve suspects

described as black by their victims.

"It is disingenuous to use strictly population proportions without accounting for reported crime," said Paul J. Browne, the Police Department's chief spokesman. "Minorities are disproportionately the victims of crime, and the police respond to where crime is reported."

The numbers showed a sharp increase in stops during the last three months of the year.

There were 140,151 stops from October through December, up from 109,855 during the same quarter a year earlier. Previously, the highest total for a single year was 508,540 in 2006, according to departmental statistics.

Peter F. Vallone Jr., chairman of the City Council's Public Safety Committee, said the practice of stopping civilians on the streets to question and search them is "the most effective" crime suppression tool.

"Stop-and-frisks usually increase after high-profile shootings or after an increase in shootings, and we have seen an increase in both of those in the last year," said Mr. Vallone. "They usually increase as a result of the community's demands to do something to catch the culprits and eliminate illegal guns. It seems, unfortunately, that there has been a rise in murders and in high-profile shootings."

