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Joint statement of:

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Chief Michael Schirling, Burlington Police Department  
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On the release of Vermont's first ever law enforcement traffic stop Race Data Collection report.

We are pleased to be here today marking yet another first in the evolution of law enforcement operations and community partnership in Vermont.

Today marks a key point in a four-year journey involving many community stakeholders who have sought to build on solid foundation of our efforts to foster mutual trust between the community and law enforcement officers. There are many who have expended much effort to bring the partnership this far. Among them:

- The Members, past and present, of the Uncommon Alliance Steering Committee.
- The countless community members who have attended and actively participated in Uncommon Alliance meetings and community discussions over the past four years.
- The Academic Advisory who have volunteered their expertise during the analysis process
- Our many criminal justice partners.
- All of the police officers and support personnel who have worked to collect data in their daily work and who work tirelessly each day to keep our communities, all members of our communities, safe.

The issue of race disparity in our country is one filled with passion, emotion, and extensive and often tragic history. Embedded within that history are images and stories of police, the enforcement arm of government, and the entire criminal justice system being used as a direct instrumentality of racism and bias. Sadly, this history tarnished the integrity of these critical institutions, which exist to translate the ideal of equality before the law into practice.

Today, we are committed to work tirelessly to both learn and distance ourselves from those historic events, to grow as a community, as organizations, and as individuals. Today the manner in which law enforcement operates in Vermont bears little resemblance to that history. However because of our socialization, we all bear the burden of some prejudice from the past. The challenge lies in identifying and correcting biases in criminal justice as well as public misconceptions of bias to build trust that is the foundation of modern law enforcement.

Among our key roles, and the one highlighted today, is to mitigate the impact of those biases in law enforcement operations and in the criminal justice system as a whole. Bias in law enforcement and criminal justice not only adversely impacts those who bias is exerted on, sometimes by dehumanizing them, but erodes the effectiveness of the criminal justice system by distracting resources from real problems.

The data analysis report released today is an important step in that process - in the evolution of our respective law enforcement organizations, the Uncommon Alliance, and policing in Vermont. It is however, just one small piece of a large and complex puzzle. Policing our

communities without bias requires many things including;

- o Good hiring practices that involve community stakeholders and are reflective of our shared values
- o Effective, ongoing training at all levels of the criminal justice system
- o Thoughtful policy development
- o Bold and effective leadership and supervision
- o Community partnerships like the Uncommon Alliance and others which enhance accountability to the community
- o An accessible and effective complaint and review process
- o And the collection and analysis of data – as demonstrated here

We are eager to see the results of the 2010 Census and incorporate that data into our assessments and planning around this report.

This data collection project represents not only an effort at trust building, but as important, the implementation of a learning tool for law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement in the 21st century is complex and complicated and concern regarding bias in policing is one of many daily challenges we face. The increasing level of complexity, particularly in proactive law enforcement operations which are so critical to detecting crime and ensuring community safety, must achieve balance. Balance in mitigating the impact of bias in our operations but also balance in ensuring that the issue of bias and profiling is not used improperly. It is important to recognize but not overemphasize that there are those who use this issue as a means to attempt to intimidate officers from doing their job by verbally attacking them as a means to obfuscate the inquiry into their misdeeds. We must continue to work toward meaningful solutions to all of these issues through building meaningful relationship and trust with the community.

Today does not mark the end, but rather a beginning with the emergence of a tool to inform our future conversations, shape our continued efforts, and help guide us to the next step in the important process of mitigating bias in policing. It is an opportunity to renew our collective commitment to continue to work together as a community on this important topic. The end goal is simple – to shift the thought process from one where law enforcement is sometimes seen as an instrument of bias to one where law enforcement is seen as the leader in protecting our communities from bias.

You have our sincere commitment to continuing this work with the Uncommon Alliance, community members and leaders, and within our own law enforcement organizations – each rich with a dedicated staff of professional law enforcement officers, dispatchers, and support staff working each day to protect our communities and deliver world-class service - to ensure that our communities are safe, livable, and free from bias for all those who live, work, and visit them.