



SARASOTA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

BIAS-BASED PROFILING POLICY

Bias-based profiling occurs when, whether intentionally or unintentionally, an officer applies his or her own personal, societal, or organizational biases or stereotypes when making decisions or taking police action, and the ONLY reason for that decision or action is because of a person's race, ethnicity, background, gender, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, age, culture or other personal characteristic, rather than due to the observed behavior of the individual or the identification of the individual as being, having been, or about to be engaged in criminal activity.

It is the policy of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office to protect the constitutional rights of all people, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical handicap, religion or other belief system or physical characteristic, and to treat each person with respect and dignity. While contacting persons in a variety of situations is not only routine, but also germane to law enforcement activities, the agency will not accept or tolerate bias-based profiling.

Law enforcement officers are required to use skills developed through observation, training and experience in order to identify suspicious circumstances, unusual occurrences and violations of the law (municipal ordinance, criminal and traffic), and to act according to the situation. We contact people who, according to our training, experience and knowledge are in a place or are acting in a way to make us believe that a crime was committed. This proactive approach aids in the detection and apprehension of criminals, maintains the safety of our streets and highways, and protects our citizens and community from crime.

Discriminating enforcement practices can alienate our citizens, foster distrust of police in the community, invite media scrutiny, legislative action and judicial intervention, and potentially lead to allegations of constitutional and civil rights violations. As we perform our duties, it is imperative that we afford all citizens the constitutional and fundamental right to equal protection under the law. We use accepted investigative tools. Criminal profiling is one of many accepted and necessary law enforcement investigative practices. However, it differs from and should not be confused with bias-based profiling. One is an investigative tool; the other is a discriminatory practice.

When investigating a crime, we use every legitimate tool at our disposal to narrow the list of potential suspects so we can identify, find and arrest those responsible for the crime, bring them to justice and keep them from committing more acts against society.

Based on current and historical law enforcement investigative knowledge and experience, we scrutinize a set of facts and factors common to specific (e.g., serial murder with a certain 'signature') or general (e.g., narcotics trafficking) criminal activity. From these facts and factors, we may be able to identify a type of person or group of people by gender, age, race, and/or by personality, social, and other characteristics, which are most likely to be involved. This can result in fewer suspects to consider and a quicker resolution to the case.

While criminal profiling does add elements (such as gender, race or ethnicity) to a list of factors scrutinized to identify a suspect, these elements are only parts of several pieces of the puzzle that law enforcement must put together to solve a crime.