

Statement from the Needham Select Board

March 15, 2021

The Needham Select Board has received the independent investigation report of Natasha Tidwell and the firm of Saul Ewing Arnstein and Lehr into the incident involving members of the Needham Police Department and Mr. Marvin Henry in January 2020.

The Town retained Attorney Tidwell and her firm to investigate the events of the incident, the follow up, and relevant Needham policies, practices and procedures, including determination of whether and to what extent racial discrimination or implicit bias were factors in the case, and to offer recommendations based on those findings. Attorney Tidwell and the firm of Saul Ewing Arnstein and Lehr are nationally recognized experts in this work.

Key findings of the report are that, under the circumstances, the officers had reasonable suspicion to stop Mr. Henry and the preponderance of the evidence does not support a finding that the officers racially profiled Mr. Henry. The report includes other findings and suggestions for improvement, which the Board takes seriously, and we need time to evaluate them.

The Board acknowledges the impact this incident had on Mr. Henry. Mr. Henry has expressed that this incident was a traumatic and painful one and for that, we are deeply sorry. Mr. Henry did nothing wrong. He was wrongly identified by a neighborhood business and accused of shoplifting. When he was released by police, he was informed that he was a suspect in a crime. He deserved to be notified as soon as it was determined that he was no longer a suspect.

In making this statement the members of the Select Board acknowledge and restate our support for the men and women of the Needham Police Department. Their work is challenging and difficult. They put their lives on the line every day and confront situations most of us never will. We believe the officers on the scene used their best judgment under the circumstances. We acknowledge the Police Department's cooperation throughout this investigation.

We will be working with the Needham Police Chief to consider opportunities for improvements to practices and policies as recommended by Attorney Tidwell, as appropriate. The Board acknowledges the need and obligation to continue to ensure that our policies and procedures are respectful to all while also respecting the needs of police officers to remain safe.

The Board thanks Attorney Tidwell and her team for their thorough effort and diligence during these past difficult months.