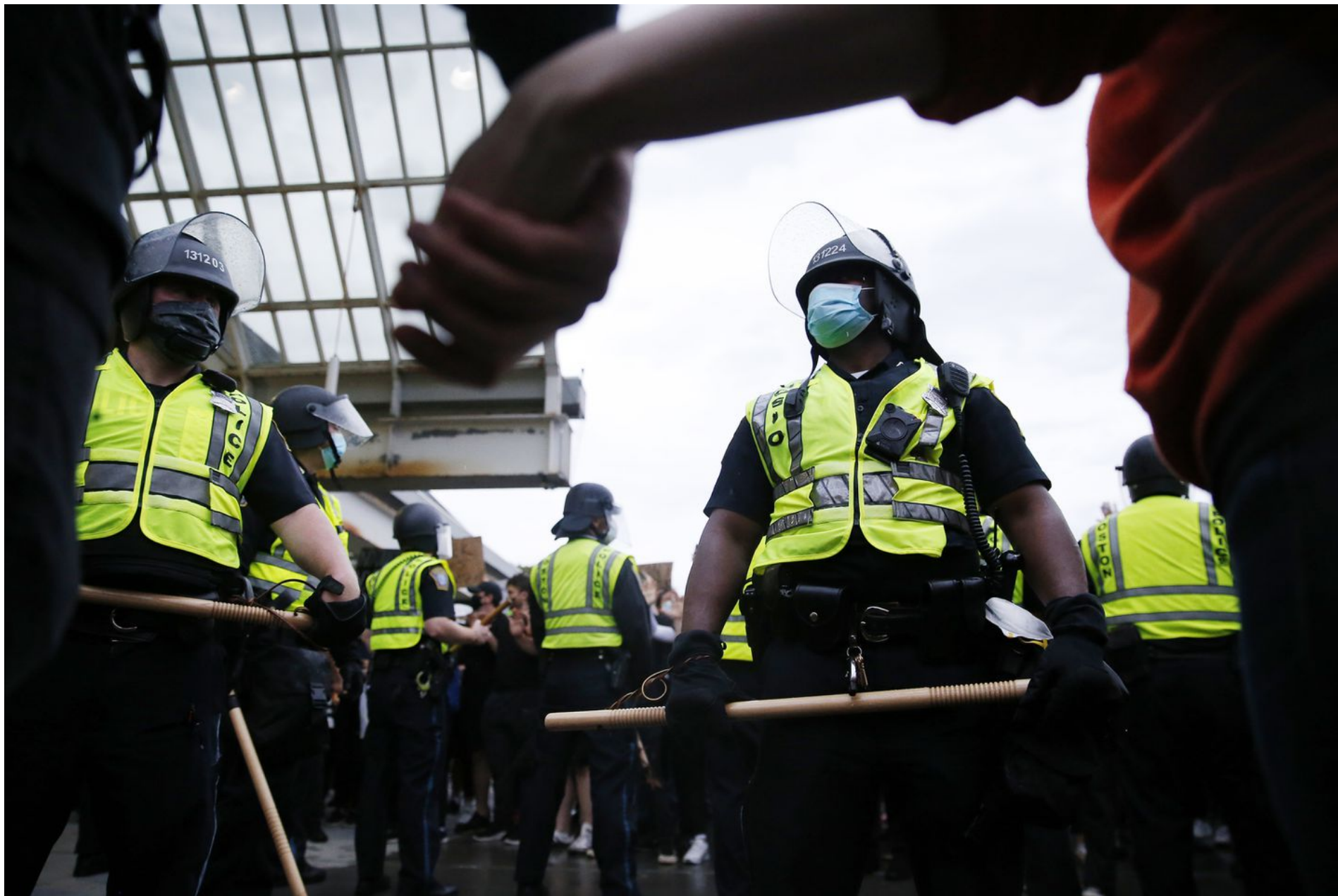


Boston police spent more than \$200,000 on military-style equipment during first five months of this year

By [Laura Crimaldi](#) and [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, Updated June 23, 2020, 8:44 p.m.



Protesters linked arms to form a barricade between the police and protesters following a rally and vigil organized by Black Lives Matter Boston and Violence in Boston. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

The Boston Police Department spent more than \$200,000 to arm officers with military-style equipment, including sniper rifles, during the first five months of 2020, and finalized some purchases as demonstrators took to the streets of Boston to protest the killing of a Black man by a white police officer in Minneapolis, according to internal records released Tuesday.

Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu made the trove of documents public a day before the council is to debate the police department's \$414 million budget, which critics say should be cut in favor of more generous spending for social programs. The documents, some of which police had kept secret for years, cover a wide array of police operations, from weapons used by the SWAT team to 10 years of data on internal affairs investigations and where officers have executed search warrants.

The department provided the records to comply with a City Council order passed on June 5, after officers used military-style equipment during demonstrations against racial injustice and police brutality.

"We need to make immediate commitments to demilitarizing the police and keeping our community safe," Wu said Tuesday in an interview. "There are some questions about taxpayer funds and how much of our resources through the city budget are going to the purchase of military-grade weapons."

The disclosures follow nationwide protests against police brutality toward Black people and growing anger over outfitting civilian officers with military-style gear.

Boston police had previously refused to disclose some of the records sought in public records requests, telling the Globe

in 2017 that the public disclosure of documents about SWAT equipment and vehicle inventories was “likely to jeopardize public safety.”

On May 29, the same day that Boston police arrested 10 demonstrators after a clash in the South End, the department submitted a purchase order for more than \$21,000 to buy concealable sniper rifles, suppressors, and magazine rounds from a vendor in Phoenix, the records show.

On June 1, the day after looting and violence broke out in downtown Boston, Atlantic Tactical in New Cumberland, Pa., provided the department’s special operations unit with an itemized list for \$141,365 worth of “smoke, gas, and chemical agent grenades and other projectiles.” The document said the department would “pay for overnight shipping.”

The department had been considering buying the equipment from Atlantic Tactical since at least April 20, records show. A Boston police spokesman said Tuesday that he was unsure whether the transaction had been completed.

The records released Tuesday show that the Boston police stockpile of military grade equipment includes M4 rifles, AR-15 semiautomatic rifles, shotguns, grenade launchers, tasers, night vision scopes, and firearm suppressors. The department has three armored vehicles worth about \$876,000 and a “gas inventory” of projectiles filled with gas, smoke, and vapors that emit chemical agents that cause people to people to cry, cough, sneeze, or struggle to breathe, the records say.

Wu said she opposes the use of tear gas and rubber bullets to control crowds as well as federal programs that help police departments purchase military equipment. [A proposal recently unveiled by Councilors Ricardo Arroyo and Andrea Campbell would limit the use of chemical substances and projectiles like rubber bullets to control crowds.](#)

Boston police object to describing the gear as “military” equipment. Both the department and the office of Mayor Martin J. Walsh said Tuesday the equipment is intended for civilian use. The rifles are semiautomatic, sold commercially, and do not have same functionality as rifles used by the military, said Sergeant Detective John Boyle, a spokesman.

The department “takes its responsibility to protect the people of Boston seriously and a large part of that responsibility is being prepared with the necessary equipment,” he said in a statement.

The department doesn’t use all the equipment in its inventory on a daily basis, Boyle said.

Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, executive director of Boston-based Lawyers for Civil Rights, said his group has heard from partners in the community that Boston police were acquiring more military-style gear, as many departments around the country have done in recent years.

But he was not aware before Tuesday how much gear the department was purchasing or how much money it was spending on the equipment, he said.

“This is obviously very disturbing because it confirms one of our worst fears, which is that significant resources have been spent in essentially militarizing the police department in Boston in a way that will most certainly increase the tension between communities of color and law enforcement, particularly in the wake of George Floyd’s murder in Minneapolis,” he said.

“At this time, in the current climate, with the national reckoning on racial justice and policing, we need to be exploring

ways to deescalate law enforcement, not to arm and militarize police,” he added.

As the City Council convenes to discuss budget proposals for next year, Walsh has signaled that he is open to reallocating some money set aside for the police department, but has argued that budget changes alone won’t address concerns about unfair policing or racism in law enforcement.

The police documents also provide some insight into the department’s system for investigating officers accused of misconduct, showing that a vast majority of complaints are not upheld.

Since 2010, the department has completed 4,176 internal investigations into complaints about use of force, disrespectful treatment, unbecoming conduct, neglect of duty, and other offenses.

Internal investigators sustained about 30 percent of those complaints, the remaining were categorized as unfounded or not sustained, or resulted in the officer being exonerated, the records show. A dozen complaints were withdrawn, and 11 were put on file.

Of the 551 investigations that examined whether an officer improperly used force, only 13 percent of complaints were sustained. A spreadsheet detailing the investigations provided the names of the officers involved but didn’t disclose the specifics of the complaints or reveal information about the civilians involved in the encounters.

“I think we need to have a specific conversation about an accountability system where accountability applies across the board,” Wu said. “We know that when the mechanism for receiving complaints is less trusted, people are less likely to file actual grievances.”

A Walsh spokeswoman cited the recent creation of a task force led by Wayne Budd, a former US attorney, that will

review use-of-force policies and other equity issues facing the department. The group plans to complete its work on an “expedited timeline to meet the opportunity this moment offers us.”

“Mayor Walsh has pledged to make Boston a national leader in this work and he is committed to following through on that promise,” said Samantha Ormsby, the spokeswoman.

The police documents suggest communities of color are more likely to be targeted by SWAT raids or no-knock warrants, Wu said. The raids and warrants are mostly related to alleged drug crimes, according to Wu.

In the disclosure of records about SWAT raids, Boston police provided reports from 2010 to 2014, the period before recreational marijuana was legalized in Massachusetts. The department said it planned to release redacted reports from 2015 to present by Friday.

Boyle said the warrants are authorized by magistrates or judges on the grounds that there is probable cause to believe that contraband will be found at the search site. No-knock warrants are issued, he said, in cases where police prove officers would be endangered if the target knew of their arrival in advance. That typically occurs when officers have information about a target being armed, Boyle said.

Globe Correspondent Jeremy C. Fox contributed to this report.

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