by Courtney Gross
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If police officers pull their triggers the City Council will now be put on notice under legislation passed unanimously by the council on Wednesday.

The New York City Police Department will be required to submit annual reports to the council detailing incidents of gunfire by police officers. The department will have to include the race, gender and age of those involved in the incident.

The bill, (Intro 516-A) sponsored by Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr., has the support of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, according to a mayoral spokesman.

Keeping Tabs on Triggers

Lauded as an effort to keep the police department accountable, the proposal is not an indication of any problems there, city officials cautioned. But, instead, it hopes to identify trends and give the council greater oversight of data, which has been difficult to receive at times. Before this proposal, the department was not required to provide gunfire statistics to the council, and only did so sporadically and voluntarily.

"We haven't determined there is any problem in this area," said Vallone. "But we don't know this information unless we get it, and there is no requirement we receive this information now."

In the past, the department did not include the race, gender or age of individuals involved in shooting incidents with police officers. On the other hand, said Council Speaker Christine Quinn, the department did provide the breed and the sex of a dog if a police officer had shot it. The speaker called the difference "absurd."

Though the administration has expressed support for the bill, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association opposes the proposal. Association President Patrick J. Lynch said in a written statement, "The NYPD is the country's most restrained police departments in the use of deadly physical force. Requiring a report for every firearms discharge is unjustified and will not benefit anyone but the paper suppliers. It's a solution in search of a problem."

Other police officials have complained complying with the legislation would be costly and labor intensive. Council officials disputed that argument, saying it would only require officials collect more specific demographic information than they already do.

Primarily, the bill will give city officials a snapshot of the types of incidents that lead to pulling triggers by police officers. In recent years, said Vallone, police shootings have decreased significantly. In 1997, a weapon was discharged 253 times. In 2007, a gun was fired by police officers 111 times, and approximately 30 to 40 of those incidents involved animals, he added.

The new data will be provided borough by borough and precinct by precinct. Quinn said the council has not determined whether the annual reports will be made available on its Web site.

Members of the council's Black, Latino and Asian Caucus applauded the proposal, saying it would help determine whether certain races are targeted.

"In communities of color it is extremely important we have that information," said Councilmember Robert Jackson, the co-chair of the caucus. "It seems as though these people that are shot are people of color."