

Show your work, officer; stop and frisk, fully explained

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Explaining to do (Mark Bonifacio/New York Daily News)

The federal judge who handled the NYPD stop-question-frisk case announced that she is retiring from the bench — just as her ruling against the department signals new paperwork for cops.

Neither event is all bad.

While generally admired as a jurist, Shira Scheindlin declared the department guilty of broad constitutional violations based on wild statistical extrapolations.

The NYPD's challengers drew the numbers from forms filed by cops after officers had stopped people suspected of criminality. Cops checked boxes that gave the most cursory possible explanations for their actions.

Although the forms were never intended to offer complete legal justifications, the box-checked rationales were built into a numerical

picture of illegality. That may or may not have been possible if, from the start, cops had been asked to explain in a few sentences why they had suspected that something was amiss.

Now, the department and its court-appointed monitor, Peter Zimroth, have developed a form that would enable cops to write out their reasoning. Zimroth is asking Scheindlin's successor, Judge Analisa Torres, to approve its use.

The downside is that cops may be deterred from enforcement by bureaucracy and fear that good-faith written mistakes in judgment will lead to discipline. The upside is that memorializing facts can help document events and can focus cops and supervisors on proper legal boundaries.

Welcome to New York policing version 2016.