



Announcing our first product to bridge the divide between police and communities



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Today, with the California Department of Justice, we launched URSUS — an all-digital police use of force data collection system. This will generate the first statewide dataset on police use of force in the country. It is the first step in our larger [Bridge](#) initiative to improve police-community relations through transparency.

- The app is [open source](#) and ready to port to other states and countries.
- You can play with a [demo version of URSUS](#)
- You can play with a [demo version of the generic app](#).
- [Click here](#) to read more about Beacon Labs's work in the criminal justice space.

About the app

First, we define a data standard for police use of force incidents. While “data standard” may be among the least-exciting phrases ever spoken, it’s both the “data” (information you can use to make better decisions) and “standard” (so

all your data is usable) together that have been missing in policing. The specific items we collect are based on dozens of interviews with law enforcement and extensive collaboration with the California Department of Justice.

Second, the app gently walks users (law enforcement officers and employees) through inputting this data in a way that is intuitive and decidedly un-painful. Our police have more important things to do than fiddle with kludgy software, so we make the app as smooth and pleasant a task as data entry can realistically be.

Administrators at law enforcement agencies (LEAs) can do analysis of their agency's incidents (basic bar charts and pivot tables) to form a better understanding of their agency's work.

Finally, at the end of the year, data is submitted to the state, where it will be compiled and released to the public in complete, raw format. The DOJ can track who has and has not completed their reporting and holistically understand the state's data as a whole.

Data collection is not a glamorous task, but it's the badly-needed plumbing in the construction of a more open, accountable, and smart criminal justice system.

What we sent the press

As more violent encounters between police and civilians occur across the country, the need for better data in policing has never been more clear. According to the FBI, only 3% of the nation's 18,000 departments report police use of force. There are no federal mandatory reporting requirements or even a unified definition of "use of force." The lack of data undermines the ability of the public to review the activities of their police and ultimately widens the trust gap between civilians and police.

“As a country, we must engage in an honest, transparent, and data-driven conversation about police use of force,” said Attorney General Harris. “I am proud that California continues to lead the nation in the adoption of technology and data to improve our criminal justice system and keep our streets safe.”

With the launch of URSUS, California will be the first state in the nation to make comprehensive police use of force data available to the public. URSUS implements Assembly Bill 71 (AB71), the first legislation in the country to mandate law enforcement to collect and report police “use of force” data throughout California. The data will be posted on California’s criminal justice data portal, OpenJustice, in early 2017.

URSUS, named after the bear on the California flag, is a web-based tool that allows law enforcement agencies in California to digitally collect and report uses of force that results in serious bodily injury or death of a civilian or peace officer. The tool replaces error-prone paper forms and takes the entire process digital: URSUS streamlines data reporting for agencies through the application’s automated error checking and dynamic screening questions. The application also provides a suite of analytical tools for agencies to track and understand incidents, including features such as interactive charts and pivot tables. Upon launch, the tool will be made available to all 800 police departments in California. A public demonstration of the tool is available at <https://ursusdemo.doj.ca.gov>.

URSUS was developed through a first-of-its-kind partnership between CA DOJ and Beacon Labs. The partnership combined Beacon Labs’s expertise in agile software development and CA DOJ’s deep knowledge of law enforcement. The development team ran CA DOJ’s first user research studies with over a dozen law enforcement agencies. Due to the unique collaboration between CA DOJ and Beacon Labs, URSUS was developed in

less than 8 months and at no cost to taxpayers, by leveraging Beacon Labs' philanthropic support.

"At Beacon Labs, we believe technology combined with policy can be a powerful lever for making change, and in policing, that change begins with better data," said Eric Liu, US Executive Director of Beacon Labs. "Our collaboration with CA DOJ on the development and launch of URSUS is an important step in addressing this issue for both California and the country."

Momentum is growing across the nation to make comprehensive police data available to the public. National legislation such as the PRIDE Act, co-sponsored by Senator Barbara Boxer of California and Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey, hope to create a federal requirement similar to AB71 by mandating police use of force data reporting in the US.

"The first step toward fixing a problem is to fully understand it, and improving data collection will help us strengthen accountability and save lives on all sides. I commend California Attorney Kamala Harris and everyone involved in this important project," said Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA).

"The PRIDE Act, which I co-sponsored with Senator Boxer, attempts to bring the same common sense ideas found in California's AB 71 to the rest of the nation. By collecting police use of force data, the PRIDE Act and AB 71 are good first steps in making police practices more transparent. By using innovative technology and data to shed a spotlight on police practices that work and do not work, California's AB 71 is an important precedent for the country," said Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ).

Beacon Labs will also make the codebase of URSUS open source to enable other states and the federal government to freely adapt and deploy the software. "With URSUS," said Eric Liu, "we're showing that simple and open

web technologies can enable accurate and cost-effective police data collection at a massive scale. We hope our approach will inspire other states and the country to act, and make critical police data, such as use of force, available to the public.”

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Editor's note: This project was executed in collaboration with [Bayes Impact](#).

Justice

Police



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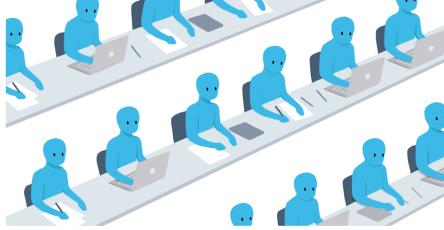
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