



TO THE MAYORS OF THE US CONFERENCE OF MAYORS:

We are a group of civil rights organizations, elected officials, faith leaders, academics, public defenders, and community led organizers who are writing to ask you to take immediate action to heal our American cities. As mayors, you hold unique power to set the agenda for your police force and your cities. More importantly, however, now is the time to enact real change so that we can begin rebuilding our cities into places where all people feel safe.

The current protests across the nation—in the aftermath of the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Tony McDade—are just the latest signs of racism and of the all-too-apparent crisis in policing in America. But it would be a mistake to focus on policing as an institution, and then to contemplate the reforms to the profession that could be made. We've made that mistake before.

Eric Garner. Michael Brown. Laquan McDonald. Sandra Bland. Jessica Williams. These police killings six years ago sparked protests across the country and birthed the Black Lives Matter movement and flood of reform efforts. Six years later, though, not enough has changed. More police killings, more protests.

The solutions we need right now both to protect our safety and to rescue our democracy are ones that meet the scale of the problem. To respond to George Floyd's death, or Breonna Taylor's death, we must replace the questions about how to reform policing with questions about what a broader vision for safety and justice in America should look like and what role policing should play in it. We are at a point in our history when the global pandemic has precipitated the highest unemployment levels since the Great Depression, left tens of millions of Americans unable to pay rent or their mortgage, and exposed how a lack of universal health care jeopardizes the health and safety not only the uninsured but all of us as a virus spreads through communities. More people have died in New York City alone from the coronavirus since April than all of the people in the state of New York that died by homicide in the past two decades combined. As with the policing crisis and so many problems in our country, even this virus has punished Black and brown communities more harshly.

This is a time when we need to ask ourselves what public safety means and whether our laws and our budgets reflect those priorities. Any clear-eyed assessment will produce a resounding no in response.

So, today our solutions must change the ways our communities work by shrinking the police footprint in our country—and by investing the savings in areas that truly will make us safer. Here are some specific ideas to start with, but these are just a few among many:

- ▶ **Fix Local Budgets.** Police budgets have ballooned so much that in many cities across the country policing gobbles up 40% or more of the city budget. Even small changes in police budgets can mean large changes for other departments. For example, in many cities, a

5% cut in police budgets would allow cities to double their spending on social services or public health. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, unemployment levels are higher than at any point since the Great Depression, hundreds of thousands of people are at risk of losing their homes, and frontline workers do not have the equipment they need to do their jobs and protect themselves. Now more than ever, we need to invest in the services that will make our communities safe and healthy instead of funding police departments at the expense of these other vital functions.

► **Get The Right Experts Responding To The Right Problems.**

- **Shift most first-responder responsibilities away from traditional law enforcement agencies because most problems arising from substance use disorders, mental health diagnoses, and poverty require medical professionals and social workers, not criminal enforcement or armed officers.** Law enforcement officers are not trained and equipped to be experts in responding to mental health crises. We shouldn't send armed law enforcement to respond to a mental health crisis any more than we'd send a social worker to respond to a burglary in progress.
- **Diversify violence prevention resources by shifting dollars from police budgets to violence interruptions programs.** Public safety budgets reflect a belief that law enforcement is the primary way to reduce violence, in large part because police officers solve serious crimes like homicides. However, clearance rates for homicides are near or at all time lows in cities across the country. We need to invest resources in a public health approach to violence prevention that stops fatal violence before it occurs and stops its spread by interrupting ongoing conflicts, working with community members at the highest risk to change behavior related to violence and community norms. Under the Cure Violence model, for example, violence is seen as a contagious problem that is transmitted through exposure that can be effectively treated and prevented using health methods.

► **Stop The Militarization Of The Police:**

- **End no knock warrants and violent, military style raids.** No knock warrants are dangerous and unnecessary, and they should be banned to protect both officers and the communities they serve. When police use force to enter into homes unannounced, people believe their home is being broken into and often defend themselves, leading to civilian and officer deaths. Any forced entry into a home, especially at night, should be banned in all but the most extreme cases, and measures should be adopted to deter/sanction violations of restrictions on forced entry into homes.
- **Restrict the flow of military equipment to local law enforcement.** Policing has changed since we started the war on drugs; police are now armed with weapons and equipment that were designed to be used again against warring countries. Instead,

the police are using those weapons in their own communities. The equipment is dangerous, dehumanizing, and unnecessary for officer safety. If anything, it escalates the situation.

- **Ban the use of military equipment and tactics on protestors.** In the last few days, we have seen pictures of protestors who have lost their eyes after being shot by rubber bullets; elected officials peacefully protesting who have been tear-gassed, and grieving community members coming face to face with police officers in riot gear. The goal of the police during times of unrest should be to allow peaceful protests, and to take any/all measures necessary to avoid a violent confrontation between the police and protestors. To achieve that goal, all military equipment and tactics must be banned.

► **Curtail The Corrosive Power of Police Unions:**

- **Make police contracts and the negotiations around them public and open to community comment.** The police have long used the contract process to enlarge their budgets, often behind closed doors. Instead, the process of asking for more money for the police should be done openly, and the public should be aware that when money is given to the police for more police officers, it may mean that a mental health center or a food bank will lose funding. When the process is out in the open, it means that the police will also have to justify their requests and produce data shows that things like enlarging the police force or procuring military equipment is linked to public safety.
- **Pledge to refuse political donations from law enforcement unions, associations, and political action committees.** The police unions are one of the few agencies that works directly with/for elected officials yet is able to give individual campaign donations. When these same elected officials are charged with deciding the police budget, or whether to replace a police chief, or whether a police officer has lied in court, the giving of campaign donations tarnishes the relationship and causes the public to lose trust in the process. All elected officials should refuse political donations from any law enforcement union, association, or PAC, and officials who have received donations should return it.

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