
A QUAKER CALL TO ACTION!

INTRODUCTION

A Black man named George Floyd was murdered by four police in Minneapolis, MN on May 25, 2020. The video of his death has sparked global protest against police brutality and lethality, specifically police violence against Black people. Protests across the United States have been met with National Guard, police in riot gear, armored vehicles, and drone surveillance. Curfews have been imposed and tactics including 'kettling', tear gas, rubber bullets, and mass arrests have been used to intimidate protesters.

We, the **Justice Action Group (JAG)**, members and attenders of Ann Arbor Friends Meeting, believe that the U.S. system of policing and punishment is inhumane, ineffective, disproportionately imposed on marginalized groups and obstructs justice. Witnessing the loss of life at the hands of law enforcement, the violence perpetrated towards protesters, and the unresolved legacy of slavery and our country's persistent devaluation of Black life has been truly heartbreaking. We feel moral outrage. We have been witness to a system of punishment that is actively harming communities and individuals alike. The status quo is unacceptable and it is our conviction that transformational change can wait no longer. Human life is sacred, deserving of love, nourishment, and protection.

We believe that fundamental and systemic changes, rather than incremental reforms which maintain the institution of policing, are necessary to address the continued criminalization of Black people. We ask Friends to listen to and believe Black experiences of policing and incarceration and to acknowledge that the system of policing was designed to control Black people and maintain social inequality. Furthermore, we encourage Friends to understand the history of Quaker complicity in this violence.

INCREMENTAL CHANGE WON'T FIX THIS

Working for reforms that maintain or expand police powers presupposes that the system is inherently good and only requires minor adjustment in practices. In reality, incremental changes are not only inadequate to address the ways police impose violence and control on whole communities, but counterproductive, since the reforms increase seeming legitimacy of the institution while stalling transformational change. Police continue to criminalize "existing while Black", increase the use of military tactics, and kill Black people with impunity. Furthermore, imposing harsher penalties on individual police and police departments is not enough because it leaves the underlying system of violent oppression intact. Incremental changes like bias training and increasing

surveillance with body cameras, support the nature of the institution of policing, expand its budget and control over civilians, and do not result in less police violence.

Friends will recognize that our country has witnessed nationwide protests followed with vows to change policing before. For example, since the murder of Michael Brown in 2014, "police departments [have] spent tens of millions of dollars on body cameras, revised use-of-force policies and held training sessions on implicit bias and de-escalation. A presidential task force issued 153 recommendations and action items. The Justice Department forced seven troubled police departments into consent decrees with mandatory benchmarks aimed at reducing racial disparities and police brutality."^[1]

Yet, in the 20 days following the murder of George Floyd, U.S. police have killed 120 more people.^[2] This loss of life is testament to the **enormous failure of the incremental policing reforms** attempted over the past six years.

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE: DEFUND POLICE

Protesters are calling to "**Defund the Police**" (#defundthepolice) as a pathway towards abolishing policing as we know it and replacing it with safety and well-being for all communities. Redirecting funding that currently goes towards policing will reduce the scale of policing, challenge the notion that policing increases safety, and support entities that invest in community well-being. Protesters are calling for a **fundamental change**.

"Defund the police" does not mean elimination tomorrow. It does not mean no one answers 911-calls. It does however mean fundamentally shifting our ideas about public safety away from a violence-based system towards a healing-based model that respects the humanity of all parties and reallocates funds to the appropriate social services. We believe the safest communities are not the ones with the most police, they are the ones with the most resources.

The clear path forward is to defund brutal systems of racial and social control and to redirect our resources to the social structures that help communities flourish: safe, affordable housing, education, health care, mental health and substance abuse treatment, jobs with a living wage and public resources like schools, libraries, food and water access, transportation infrastructure, and greenspace.

As Quakers we believe that there is that of God in all. If we believe in the sacred value of every human being and oppose violence as a violation to human bonds and Spirit's intention for us, we must eliminate violence by the state.

[contd.]

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CALL TO ACTION

We ask each Friend to:

1. commit to support defunding police, both individually and within the Meeting
2. believe Black experiences of policing and incarceration
3. acknowledge that the system of policing was designed to control Black people and maintain social inequality
4. investigate the history of Quaker complicity in this violence

These commitments are rooted in the conviction that the present policing and punishment system must be abolished to create and fund a new system for true safety and security. This may sound radical, but it is not new. This has been part of the American Friends Service Committee's agenda for decades.

We hope this statement will serve as a gateway to productive dialogue regarding policing and punishment systems, the social inequities they perpetuate, how supporting them is incompatible with Quaker values, and ways Friends might imagine and advocate for the freedom and safety of all.

– Greg Cline, Kate Kelley, Lindsay Dykema
Lynn Drickamer, Megan Mueller Johnson
Megan Wilson, Neil Shadle
Rabindar Subbian, Ruth Zweifler

REFERENCES

- [1] S. Dewan and M. Baker, "Rage and Promises Followed Ferguson, but Little Changed", *Nytimes.com*, 2020. [Online]. Available: nytimes.com/2020/06/13/us/unrest-ferguson-police-reform.html . [Accessed: 19- Jun- 2020].
- [2] K. LaCapria, "Have Police in the United States Killed 120 People Since George...", *Truth or Fiction?*, 2020. [Online]. Available: truthorfiction.com/have-police-in-the-united-states-killed-120-people-since-george-floyds-death/ . [Accessed: 19- Jun- 2020].

