



Wednesday August 5, 2020

Committee of Conference

Policing Reform Bill — H.4886/S.2820

Dear Representative Cronin, Representative González, Representative Whelan, Senator Brownsberger, Senator Chang-Díaz, Senator Tarr:

We write to you in support of our clergy colleagues of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the eighteen member denominations of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, and on behalf of our Executive Board that has voted affirmatively to support the work of policing reform. Indeed, we write to you as Christian leaders convinced that God and history will judge us by the decisions and actions of public leaders at this moment.

You who write laws can bend the arc of justice with your pens.

As clergy, we are humbled to listen and bear witness to the most tender and painful moments of people's lives. We have heard, far too often, of the corrosive suffering of over-policing, the weariness of wondering if Black bodies will make it home safely after a late-night prayer service, and the enduring pain of inaction when complaints linger and accountability is never achieved.

We pray and urge you to lead with your values of racial equity and justice as you move forward on comprehensive policing reform.

With the eyes of history, the testimony of our parishioners, and the witness of our Scripture that command our pursuit of justice, and the hope for your leadership across the Commonwealth, we make the following requests of you:

1. Meet all four of the demands of the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus.
 - a. Create a police decertification system that has the independent power to investigate police misconduct and is not constrained by the "preponderance of the evidence" standard to initiate investigations, and has a majority of the commission members made up of civilians who are either people of color, work for racial justice organizations, or both;
 - b. Create a commission to study the civil service exam and other necessary reforms to promote equity, diversity, and transparency in the police workforce;

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c. Implement serious limits on police use of force that include a duty to intervene, an exhaustion requirement for the use of deadly force, bans on the use of choke-holds, teargas, and limits to no-knock warrants that can only be obtained upon the specific and credible threat to officers' safety and an affirmation that there are no children or elders in the home; and

d. Create a commission on structural racism.

2. Place meaningful limits on qualified immunity. The language in section 10 of the Senate bill appropriately addresses this legal doctrine that has denied victims of police violence their day in court. This change would not eliminate qualified immunity but balance the scales of justice and require police to conduct themselves in a way that is authorized by law.

3. Enact the House version of the ban on face surveillance technology. This unreliable, unregulated and racially biased technology has no place in our communities, and we are pleased to see that the House bill bans the use of the technology with limited exemptions for police use only in exigent circumstances.

We believe that God has appointed all of us for the work of this moment, to bring about more justice, more truth, more liberation. As Mordecai spoke to Esther, "Who knows? Perhaps you were created for such a time as this." ~Esther 4:14.

At this unique political moment, we are watching and waiting to see if you will indeed take up the pen and bend the arc of justice, or if you will let this critical opportunity slip from our hands. We pray you follow the divine call for justice. Perhaps you were created too for such a time as this.

With hope,

Rev. Laura Everett, Executive Director

Rev. Meagan Manas, Director of Internal Relationships

Rev. Kenneth Young, Director of External Relationships

Rev. Carrington Moore, Lydia Fellows Program Director