



Impact Statement of Lesley McSpadden
Mother of Michael Brown
Oversight Hearing on Policing Practices
U.S. House Judiciary Committee
Thursday, September 19, 2019

No charges, no conviction, no prosecution for the killer of my dear son, 18 year old Michael O.D. Brown, Jr. The question is, why? And the answer is because the shooter was a police officer and that is enough to justify killing an unarmed teenager who, in fear for his life, ran. An unarmed teenager who was chased and gunned down assassination style in broad daylight with school-aged children staring, residents of the Canfield Green apartments looking out of their windows, and construction workers watching as he held up his hands in surrender. He held his hands up with the very same questionable look on his face — ‘why?’ — when, infamous the Darren Wilson fired a fatal sixth shot to the top of his head causing his eye to eject from his skull.

This was not a scene from a horror movie. This has become a part of my life. My son would lay in the street for four and a half hours, now symbol of strange fruit that had fallen from a tree. Can you imagine hearing such horrific facts while on lunch break at work? Especially with work being in an upscale place with folks of the same color skin as the killer. With race being a factor, *I* was now in the danger zone, but my son, myself and my family were and still are the victims.

I tried to shield my children from seeing their brother as he laid there. I tried to shield my children from the media. I tried to shield my children from the verbal attacks and death threats I was receiving for standing up for my son’s life and civil rights. I had to walk away from my job of 12 years that gave me .10 cents for working 8000 hours, but that was normal.

August 9th, noon was the time of day, was not normal for my family. Suddenly, within 45 seconds to be exact, I would start a new job. That day I started a job that doesn't come with insurance, vacation pay, or retirement pension. It’s a job that came with pain, hurt, devastation,

loss, confusion, anxiety, hate, racism, and controversy. It doesn't sound like a job you would sign up for right? I know I didn't.

My son was a FATAL VICTIM OF POLICE BRUTALITY. My new job had become being my son's voice as an activist and advocate for justice, working with law professors and students from Howard Law school for the MIKE BROWN BILL which outlines safeguards and laws for minorities in urban areas with challenging jail systems and unjust 'justice' systems. I became a leader in my community demanding policy change and police training mentally and socially, ultimately becoming the youngest, but loudest, Mother of the Movement against police brutality.

My children continue to suffer and struggle with the murder of their big brother. Michael is my first born child. He was, and continues to be, a leader for his brother and sisters. The memories good and bad aren't going away, they are growing with them. Because of this we are in therapy often, all due to a rogue cop who should have never been given the opportunity to wear a badge. A rogue cop who completely abused the community he swore to protect and serve and gave the police uniform and occupation a bad look. A rogue cop who broke trust within communities across the country.

But I know you couldn't imagine what I've been through or what I continue to go through — I hear that a lot. My response is always "I know, and that's why we continue to see the killings of black and brown children at the hands of those who forgot we are FREE"

When I started my foundation, I wanted it to be a place for grieving mothers. When we lost Michael, I had no outlet — I had nowhere to go. I met with Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon Martin's mom, and Gwen Carr, Eric Garner's mom, and Ms. Carr asked me, "Do you know what you want to do after this?" And I said "No, I don't have a clue what I want to do or what I *should* be doing." Ms. Carr said, "maybe you should start a foundation." So I formed Rainbow of Mothers, where moms who have lost a child can begin their healing and talk to a therapist. That's a stigma for black people — we don't feel that you should talk to a therapist if you're not 'crazy'. But losing your child to police violence is something that could absolutely drive you crazy.

The most important thing to me is to secure the lives of other children. My son is gone — I can't bring him back — but how can we put something in place where other children are protected? I started working on the Mike Brown Bill. If passed, it would take away federal funding from state and local police who do not work with an independent civilian review board; requires mandatory data collection from law enforcement to analyze racial profiling and use of force;

requires all states and local law enforcement to have a use-of-force policy with force proportional to the suspected crime; ends police militarization and establishes the Mike Brown Fund, modeled after the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund. I am also supportive of the Hands Up Act that would create a mandatory minimum sentence for the police killing of unarmed civilians.

I hope and pray that one day I can see the bill become the Mike Brown Law. That may be the first and only time I feel that my son has gotten justice. I feel powerless without anything changing. Nothing has changed—nothing's happening. I just get to visit a gravesite every birthday and every August 9.

Lesley McSpadden