



Rev. Al Sharpton, President & Founder, National Action Network Inc

Testimony of Reverend Al Sharpton
Oversight Hearing on Policing Practices
U.S. House Judiciary Committee
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Thank you, Chairman Nadler and members of the Judiciary Committee for convening this important “Oversight Hearing on Policing Practices.”

Back in July, I joined Mrs. Gwen Carr – the mother of Eric Garner – and we met with you and other members of Congress here on Capitol Hill to discuss how we might eliminate patterns and practices of unconstitutional conduct by state and local law enforcement authorities throughout the nation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for recognizing that police reform is a priority and should not be left up to local cities and state jurisdictions. Indeed, there is a role for the federal government to play to address this national crisis

and I am hopeful that we can come up with some solutions.

I testify this morning in my capacity as a Baptist preacher and Founder and President of National Action Network, a national civil rights organization that has more than 105 chapters operating across the country and offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Atlanta, Detroit and Miami.

Founded in 1991, NAN works within the spirit and tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to promote a modern civil rights agenda that includes the fight for one standard of justice, decency and equal opportunities for all people regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, criminal record, economic status, gender, gender expression or sexuality.

I should say from the onset that NAN has never been anti-police. We are, however, anti-police brutality. We know that most police officers are hardworking and law-abiding citizens who take the oath to serve and protect quite seriously. They put their lives on the line everyday to keep us all safe and we are grateful for their enormous service and sacrifice.

However, over the past two decades, there has been a growing and disturbing trend of mostly unarmed Black and Brown young men who have been the victims of discriminatory police practices and these encounters with law enforcement have led to their untimely deaths. These statistics should cause us all great alarm.

There are too many victims to name. But we all know their stories. We've read about them in the newspaper and have seen them on the nightly news: Eric Garner, Michael Brown, LaQuan McDonald, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Stephon Clark and countless others.

I've spent days and nights with grieving parents and family members who wanted nothing more but justice for their loved one who was senselessly shot or choke to death by an officer. I've preached the funerals. You can feel the pain and heartache. And even in the despair, I made a promise to the victims' families that I would push Congress to enact federal legislation to address fatal misconduct.

The time to address this issue is now. There is a deep-seated mistrust of the police in many communities of color and we have to find ways to rebuild trust.

Quite simply, there is a need for greater oversight on the patterns and practices of law enforcement across the country. Without these checks and balances, we will continue to experience discrimination and egregious injustices at every stage of the criminal justice system, beginning with an individual's first encounter with law enforcement officials, as we witnessed first-hand in New York with the death of Eric Garner five years ago. There is a need for police officers to undergo racial profiling and microaggression training so that they are better equipped to police in an increasingly diverse America.

Twenty years ago, a 23-year-old immigrant from Guinea, Africa named Amadou Diallo was shot and killed by four New York City police officers outside of his apartment building in the Bronx. Amadou was unarmed and reaching for his wallet when he was killed by law enforcement. All of the officers were acquitted. We staged around-the-clock protests and pushed for reforms.

On Father's Day 2012, religious, civil rights and labor leaders participated in a Silent March to End Stop and Frisk policies in New York City. These discriminatory, brutal and humiliating tactics of racial profiling had been used by the New York Police Department against hundreds of thousands of innocent people each year.

Thanks to ongoing protests and the support of Mayor Bill de Blasio, Stop and Frisk is now a practice of the past.

Still, there are ongoing challenges.

Today, we are calling for the appointment of an independent federal prosecutor to investigate police shootings across the nation and establish clear federal laws about police use of force that supersede all these state laws.

This is not a partisan issue. This is a justice issue and I would urge Congress to act now. For justice too long delayed, as Dr. King reminded us, is justice denied.