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INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA – UAW

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**Oversight Hearing on Policing Practices and Law Enforcement Accountability  
House Judiciary Committee  
Submitted by Rory Gamble  
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Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan and members of the Committee, on behalf of the million active and retired members of the International Union, UAW, I thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony for this critical and timely hearing on policing practices and law enforcement accountability.

The recent senseless and cruel killings of George Floyd, Breona Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery are sad reminders that our country continues to grapple with deep seated, racial inequalities and prejudice. I am deeply saddened by these senseless tragedies. Former UAW President Walter Reuther's speech at the 1963 March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs words still ring true today, "I share the view that the struggle for civil rights and struggle for equal opportunity, is not the struggle of Negro Americans but the struggle for every American to join in." Clearly, we have significant unfinished business. We all have a role in fixing systematic inequities, ongoing discrimination and prejudice which help shape our workplaces, institutions of learning, and personal interactions.

Labor rights and civil rights are inextricably intertwined. Since our inception 85 years ago, the UAW has proudly fought for advancing both civil and human rights for all people. Undeniably, our union would not be what it is today without the leadership and contributions of people of color and immigrants. In the 1930s, 55 percent of the workers in Detroit auto factories were African American and foreign born.

It is important to address persistent racial inequality. It is a deep-rooted problem in our country and there is no simple solution. As an African American man and union leader, we cannot look at these issues in isolation. These continued injustices are clear when we look at African American health and economic disparities. According to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), white families hold on average more than five times as much liquid assets as black families (\$49,529 vs. \$8,762.) In 2018, median household income for white households was 70 percent higher than for black households (\$70,642 vs. \$41,692).

The pandemic has also had a disproportionate effect on black people's health. Nationwide, about 30 percent of COVID-19 patients are black, even though they make up only 13 percent of the overall population. The susceptibility of African Americans to the virus is the result of a long history of discrimination and marginalization in our health care system and labor market.

The explosion of the prison population and the increasing use of mandatory minimums have had a disproportionate impact on communities of color. African American men are incarcerated at six times the rate of White men, and African American women are incarcerated at more than double the rate of White women. America spends \$80 billion on incarceration every year. Imagine how much better off we would be as a country if we could instead invest even a fraction of that money in education and creating the jobs of the future.

I commend the committee for holding this hearing on police reforms and law enforcement accountability and am pleased that you plan on voting on legislation to improve our criminal justice system this month. In the last few weeks, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators have protested across the country calling for justice, fairness, and an end to police violence. Attacks by authorities on peaceful demonstrators is an affront to all working people and the principals on which this nation was founded. If peaceful demonstrators are attacked with impunity, what is to stop the attack of workers on the picket line? Peaceful demonstrations make us stronger as country, not weaker.

It is long past time we take a closer look at policies and practices that erode civil rights. I say this with great sorrow and not to vilify our brave men and women in blue. We represent many police officers and they are truly untold heroes who go to work every day to keep all of us safe. They have bravely been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, as they are always on the front lines when our nation is in need. But in the case of George Floyd and other horrific abuses that this nation has had to witness, things went terribly wrong. We must look at this issue as a nation. No matter how painful, we cannot turn away.

There are a series of police reforms we support such as banning police chokeholds, limiting so-called "qualified immunity" for police officers that prevents them from being sued, and creating a national misconduct registry. We must face the fact that it is time for Congress to finally make lynching a hate crime. The fact that this simple action has yet to happen in the year 2020 illustrates how far we still must go.

Comprehensive solutions are needed to address police brutality and systematic racism. We urge the Committee to consider a wide range of structural reforms in addition to targeted police reforms. Equal opportunity in education, protecting workers right to form unions, investments in job training programs and incentivizing companies to create and maintain jobs in the United States should all be on the table.

It is important to stress that collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) are not the root of the problem. The rhetoric being used to denigrate unions will further divide us and undermine the collective contributions of labor, from civil rights laws to policies that rebuild the middle class.

This is not our route forward.

The United States is a great country. Our greatness is not predicated on being the wealthiest country on earth nor does it come from our superior military power. Our strength comes from our founding principles. We are “a government for the people” in which we are “all treated equally.” We cannot betray our fundamental principles and continue to lead to the world.

Let me conclude by urging us all not to focus on our differences, but to look at who we are and what we value as Americans. If this terrible pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we must stand together and protect one another. Our differences should be our strength, not our weakness.

Governors, Mayors, and communities all have a role in combatting racial injustice and inequity. Now more than ever, we need our elected leaders to take meaningful action to help heal our country and ensure that everyone is afforded fairness, justice and opportunity.

Thank you.