

“Oversight Hearing on Policing Practices and Law Enforcement Accountability”

Thank you Chairman Nadler and distinguished members of the Committee:

The death of George Floyd has galvanized the world and mobilized Americans to demand a more just system of policing, because it's become painfully obvious that what we have right now are two systems of justice -- one for white Americans and a different one for black Americans. George is one in a long line of black Americans unjustly killed at the hands -- or a knee -- of police, including Breonna Taylor, Pamela Turner, Botham Jean, Michael Brown, Stephon Clark, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile. It's important that we remember their names.

It's way past time that we revised the role of police to be peacekeepers and community partners. Of course, they must be prepared to protect themselves and the public in direct, life-threatening situations, but these should be the exception and not the rule.

What we are witnessing throughout our country is not that. Americans are being tear gassed in the streets, hit with rubber bullets, shoved violently to the ground cracking their skulls against the pavement, beaten bloodied with batons. And for what? For demanding justice for black Americans. Our constitutional rights are under attack - and not in the shadows, but in broad daylight.

Changing the behavior of police and their relationship with people of color starts at the top. We need a national standard for policing behavior built on transparency and accountability. The only reason we know what happened to George Floyd is because it was captured on video. The advent of video evidence is bringing into the light what long was hidden. It's revealing what black Americans have known for a long time -- that it's dangerous for a black person to have an encounter with a police officer.

Given the incidents that have led to this moment in time, it should be mandatory for police officers to wear body cams and should be considered an obstruction of justice to turn them off. Like a black box data recorder in an airplane, body cams replace competing narratives with a single narrative -- the truth.

Second, insist that police officers only use the level of force needed based on the level of threat actually posed by the circumstances. We've seen way too many black people shot in the back or unarmed black people shot and killed, or a handcuffed black man face down on the pavement asphyxiated by a knee on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds though he posed no threat at all. Neck restraints were used by Minnesota Police more than 200 times, resulting in suspects losing consciousness at least 44 times. Lethal restraints like chokeholds and strangleholds should be outlawed.

Finally, reform how qualified immunity applies to police officers. If officers know they have immunity, they act with impunity. If officers know they can unjustly take the life of a black person with no accountability, they will continue to do so. That's what you saw in the eyes of Derek

Chauvin, with his hand casually stuck in his pocket as he extinguished the life of George Floyd. Accountability requires that officers face public consequences for unjustly taking a life or for brutalizing a fellow American that they are sworn to protect and serve.

Too often, many officers are silent in the face of evil because of the blue shield -- the brotherhood of police officers which fosters systemic racism and abuse. But there's a higher brotherhood that God calls us to honor -- the brotherhood of mankind -- black and white. That's what we're witnessing in the diversity of protestors filling our streets. And that's the brotherhood our police officers must honor above all else.

The founding fathers knew they had not built an infallible union, but they did task us with the perpetual duty to aim for it: "a more perfect union" of justice, liberty, resilience, hope, and compassion. We have to do better and we must strive to live up to those American ideals. We are better than this. Chairman, members of the committee, you have the power to make this moment in history the tipping point so many of us have been waiting for, praying for -- that Americans are marching for. You have the power to make sure George Floyd's death is not in vain.

I've been asking for us all to take a breath - the breath that George was denied. Take a breath to consider how we use police in our society and how we hold them accountable for the tremendous power we place in their hands. Take a breath to consider how we create a more perfect union that extends equal protections to people of color. Take a breath for George.

Thank you.