



THE COALITION TO
STOP GUN VIOLENCE

February 26, 2021

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Karen Bass
Member
U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Nadler and Representative Bass:

On behalf of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, I write in support of the H.R. 1280, the George Floyd Justice in Police Act of 2021.

For far too long our police forces have been overmilitarized and have used unjustified excessive force in Black and Brown communities. Black people are stopped by police, arrested, denied bail, wrongfully convicted, issued longer sentences, and shot by police at much higher rates than White Americans.

The brutal and tragic killing of George Floyd by police officers brought to the forefront of our national attention the persistent crisis of police violence and brutality in America. Far too many Americans, particularly Black and Brown Americans, have lost their lives, been brutalized, and wrongly detained at the hands of law enforcement officers who are rarely held accountable.

This persistent crisis of police violence and brutality in America has also led to a deterioration of police-community relations and a lack of police legitimacy. Today many Black and Brown communities across America are apprehensive to trust law enforcement and often are reluctant to partner with police to act as witnesses and prevent violence. Instead, some rely on informal channels of justice, like retaliatory violence, to resolve conflict. This has contributed to cycles of daily gun violence that have a devastating toll on communities of color. For example, a 2016 study examined the relationships between police brutality, police legitimacy, and homicide rates in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The authors found that in the year after the highly publicized brutal beating of an unarmed Black man, Frank Jude, by Milwaukee police officers in 2004, calls for police services dropped dramatically in the city, particularly in underserved Black and Brown neighborhoods. In the year following the beating there were 22,200 fewer 911 calls. This one act of police brutality eroded trust in law enforcement and likely contributed to increases in gun violence, in the six months following this beating, homicides in Milwaukee increased by 32%.

The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act is the first step in building a new and healthier relationship between law enforcement and the communities that they serve. The bill would implement much-needed reforms to American police forces through numerous policy changes aimed at strengthening accountability and re-building the trust that has deteriorated between communities, particularly communities of color, and law enforcement agencies.

The Justice in Policing Act includes meaningful provisions that can enhance police-community relationships and build police legitimacy. Police legitimacy is the way community members trust in, and are willing to work with, the police. It is a vital component in reducing community gun violence. When communities view the police force as legitimate they are more willing to work with law enforcement to

identify and detain those responsible for committing acts of gun violence, and to intervene before conflicts develop into shootings. Likewise, when police legitimacy is strong, victims of violence feel safe and can rely on formal channels of justice to bring about closure, instead of resorting to retaliation. The reforms outlined in the Justice in Policing Act will encourage police departments to adopt procedurally just practice to build trust and more effectively work with community members to solve gun crimes, prevent future violence, and co-produce public safety.

We enthusiastically endorse the Justice in Policing Act and will work to see it swiftly enacted into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Horwitz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Josh Horwitz
Executive Director
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence