

Our Call for Justice in Policing

The cry of our dear neighbor impels us as Sisters of St Joseph, together with our associates and companions, to **commit ourselves to work towards dismantling interlocking systems of oppression**. Three legislative vehicles have presented themselves (The Justice in Policing Act introduced in the House and Senate, the Justice Act introduced in the Senate, and the President's Executive Order) to address the violations of civil rights experienced by people of color and diversity in our country. Even though these three vehicles were developed separately, they have areas of common ground.

As the Community of St Joseph who values seeking unity and communion, **we are disheartened by the absence of collaboration on all sides in the development of these three vehicles**. We urge all parties to find common ground for the common good and to work towards collaboration with the goal of justice for all.

We support legislation that emphasizes collaborative, bi-partisan emphasis on issues of police de-escalation in potentially violent situations. This implies that police approach their role as "community guardians" rather than warriors and that there be policy alternatives to police intervention in non-violent situations.

We see that the Senate shares a common commitment with the members of the House to do something about:

- **Reporting Systems:** increased data collection, particularly when deadly force is used;
- **Training:** more training for law-enforcement officials. We note that training is needed in areas of cultural competence, de-escalation of violent or potentially violent situations, and addressing current police culture.
- **Body Cameras:** incentives for law enforcement officers to wear body cameras. We hope that the use of body cameras would be a requirement.

Areas where the Senate has a common commitment to do something, but we prefer the House version:

- **Choke Holds and Carotid Holds:** The House bill, Justice in Policing, requires a policy that prohibits choke hold and carotid holds, with total loss of police funding for failure to have a policy. The Senate bill has a multi-year minimal funding reduction for failure to enact this policy.
- **No-Knock Warrants:** We prefer the House bill, which prohibits the use of no-knock warrants. The Senate bill only asks for annual reporting.

- **Lynching:** The House bill makes lynching a federal crime. Other symbols of hate such as burning crosses and nooses should also be prohibited.

This is an area where there currently is not a common commitment but new bi-partisan ideas are emerging that we encourage you to consider:

- **Qualified Immunity:** The House bill ends the qualified immunity doctrine that prevents police from being held legally accountable when they break the law. We support police unions and also independent investigations and oversight when officers are accused of brutality, corruption, or murder. Senator Mike Braun (R) is offering what we think are reasonable options.¹

Ideas being promoted by a single group that we think are worthy of consideration:

- **President Trump's Executive Order:** promotes the use of co-responders such as social workers to accompany police on non-violent calls.
- **Racial Profiling:** Robust metrics proposed in the House bill would help law enforcement and the community identify patterns of racial profiling across geography and demographics.
- **False Reporting:** The Senate bill strengthens penalties for false police reporting. We suggest defining severe penalties.
- **Use of Lethal Force:** The House bill says use of force is a last resort after exhausting reasonable options.
- **Demilitarization of law enforcement:** This would apply to equipment and approaches.
- **Commissions to Study Issues Regarding Racial and Criminal Justice**
 - Senate: National Criminal Justice Commission – a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system; submit recommendations for federal criminal justice reform, provide guidance to federal, state, and tribal governments. This commission's purpose could be strengthened by identifying emerging new policies and best practices which would have national significance in reducing the use of force
 - Senate: Commission on the Status of Black Men and Boys

Lastly, we would be interested in funding that could be awarded to geographic areas where the police and the community are engaging in innovative practices that could lead to emerging best practice models that are appropriately researched.

¹ See: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/jun/23/mike-braun-introduce-bill-limiting-qualified-immun/>