

June 12, 2020

The Honorable Jim Strickland
Memphis City Hall
125 N. Main St. Room 700
Memphis, TN 38103
mayor@memphistn.gov

The Honorable Lee Harris
Mayor's Office
106 Main, 11th Floor
Memphis, TN 38102

Director Michael Rallings
Memphis Police Department
170 North Main Street
Memphis, TN 38102

Sherrif Floyd Bonner, Jr.
Shelby County Sherriff's Department
201 Poplar Avenue, Suite 902
Memphis, TN 38102

District Attorney General Amy P. Weirich
201 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, TN 38102

Dear Mayor Strickland, Mayor Harris, Director Rallings, Sheriff Bonner and DA Weirich,

Recently, the country watched in horror as a Minneapolis police officer held his knee on the neck of George Floyd for nearly nine minutes while three other officers aided or stood by. Floyd begged for mercy as life drained from his body, and bystanders pleaded with officers to stop. In the following days, each of you condemned this behavior by not just calling it excessive but calling it a crime. Yet, on May 28, we woke to disturbing images of police using excessive force against demonstrators in Memphis. This type of aggressive response to citizens expressing their pain over another incident of victimization involving the police only serves to escalate tensions – as we have seen over the last several days.

We cannot speak for all Memphis and Shelby County residents or substitute our voices for those of other community members with whom we encourage you to speak. However, we offer a perspective developed over time through our collective engagement and outreach with our congregations and communities. The events of the last several days cause us to remember the police violence perpetrated against activists during the Civil Rights Movement, the 2016 Bridge Standoff, and the "Take'em Down 901" statue removal protests. We caution that continued treatment of civilians, such as that displayed during the events above and that we have seen in the past several days, has the potential to lead to the filing of lawsuits to resolve legitimate disputes or worse irreconcilable harm to community relations.

We acknowledge that police officers and sheriff deputies, similar to civilians, are not a monolithic group. Many officers and deputies are committed to professionalism and the mission to protect and serve in agreement with community values, objectives, and goals. To these law enforcement personnel, we owe a debt of gratitude.

Nonetheless, we cannot close our eyes or turn away from the unfair burden borne by Black people in our community that are too often the victims of racial profiling and biased policing, perpetrated by less honorable law enforcement personnel. To combat the harm, we must institute law enforcement reform uniformly across the city and county.

We write to request that the elected and appointed leaders of Memphis and Shelby County denounce the excessive use of force by all law enforcement personnel and acknowledge that the Memphis Police Department (MPD) and the Shelby County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) may have a problem using force appropriately. We further ask that City and County leaders buttress public condemnation and acknowledgment with budgets, policies, and practices that improve public safety while reforming law enforcement culture and increasing accountability to the people they have sworn to serve. Through community conversations, we ask that you reimagine law enforcement and define democratic policing. We urge you to embark immediately upon the following measures identified by experts:

1. Utilize Data

Throughout his term as mayor, Jim Strickland has expressed his commitment to setting citywide goals, measuring performance, and sharing the results with the public. We ask that you extend this commitment to using data to govern and assess the scope of police violence against residents. Release requested data to the public at no cost and collaborate to develop ways to document and disclose information about police violence and the use of force.

2. Use Force Responsibly

Collaborate with community leaders to create standards that dictate how and when it is appropriate to use force against civilians. Regulations must include a prohibition on the use of force that is not warranted by the nature of the crime suspected or the type of noncompliance. Force must also be prohibited that is used not just to apprehend or constrain but to punish a person suspected of committing a crime or disrespecting or failing to obey law enforcement directions. Policies must require all officers to intervene when they witness other officers using unreasonable force.

3. Criminalize Inappropriate Use of Force

Adopt, promulgate, and enforce laws that criminalize excessive use of force. To rebuild community trust, civilians must believe that no one is above the law.

4. Change Police Culture

Changing police culture begins with who you determine can wear the uniform. We must develop a process that enables hiring personnel to discern if an individual who is applying for a law enforcement position is an empathetic, understanding person with exceptional communication skills. Law enforcement officers should be individuals who can establish a connection with a person in crisis that is founded more on mutual respect than on authority.

The practice of strict vetting to include but not limited to social media scans and disclosure of excessive force incidents from other municipalities and states must be instituted.

To serve as a national model of success, we must ensure that MPD and SCSO officers receive proper training from appropriate sources throughout their law enforcement careers. Training must include a paradigm shift from a militaristic, aggressive model to a model of service. Law enforcement cannot be in a war against civilians. We request you withdraw the motion to modify the 1978 consent decree. Law enforcement in all their interaction with civilians, including cooperation with federal and state partners, must exist to serve and protect in collaboration with the community. Training must include de-escalation techniques and in-depth analysis and exploration of bias —implicit, explicit, and systemic.

5. Reform and Empower the Civil Law Enforcement Review Board (CLERB)

Empower a CLERB that is representative of the community to provide independent civilian oversight of all aspects of law enforcement governance including policies, procedures, hiring, training, budgets, and complaint investigation. Such empowerment cannot allow anyone in law enforcement leadership to override CLERB decisions.

It is crises such as we find ourselves today — a crossroads in policing, a health pandemic, and the ever-present racial divide— when authentic leadership can rise to the occasion and forge a path toward an equitable and safe society for all people. By committing to policies and practices that afford all Memphis and Shelby County residents the dignity and respect due to them, together elected and appointed Memphis and Shelby County leaders, can begin to build trust and earn legitimacy in all the communities they serve.

Respectfully submitted,

Signature: 
Christopher Davis (Jun 10, 2020 05:11 CDT)

Email: pastordavis@spbcmemphis.org
REV. DR. CHRISTOPHER DAVIS

Signature: 
Dr. Gina M. Stewart (Jun 10, 2020 13:22 CDT)

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Signature: 
Dr. Keith Norman (Jun 10, 2020 10:29 CDT)

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REV. DR. KEITH NORMAN

Bishop Linwood Dillard

Signature: 
Dr. Stacy Spencer (Jun 10, 2020 14:08 CDT)

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Pastor Darell Harrington

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Clergy Letter to Mayorfinalredits- Please Sign off by 8am 6/10/2020

















Final Audit Report

2020-06-10

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| By: | Jason Turner (pastorjlturner@gmail.com) |
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| Transaction ID: | CBJCHBCAABAAzXjt65pSR673Jyx3O4aEii_gCdYQz1kj |

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