



June 10, 2020

Members of 116<sup>th</sup> Congress:

We write on behalf of the men, women, and children whose lives have been torn apart by state sanctioned violence to call for hearings on the crisis of violence by law enforcement that is burning our nation to the ground. Our clients are the families of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Botham Jean, Atatiana Jefferson, Jemel Roberson, Everett Palmer, Jr., O’Shea Terry, Michael Dean, Cameron Lamb, and Antwon Rose II. We write not just on their behalf, but also on behalf of the thousands of men, women, and children whose pain is not broadcast on the national news, American citizens who continue to suffer in obscurity and silence.

America, since her founding, has held freedom and equality to be self-evident truths: “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Unfortunately, however, for many of her citizens, these supposed self-evident truths remain the American dream, rather than the American experience.

To many, the murder of Ahmaud Arbery by a group of racists in Georgia, and the subsequent efforts to cover-up the murder by local law enforcement seem a lurid tale from a by-gone time. It is not. It is modern day America and reflects a persistent culture in law enforcement that fails to respect America’s fundamental guarantee of equality for all human life.

George Floyd’s pleas for air were ignored as life slowly left his body. Atatiana Jefferson was gunned down by police in her Fort Worth bedroom while playing video games with her nephew. Botham Jean was murdered by police for watching television in his own apartment. Michael Dean was shot in the head during a routine traffic stop while getting milk from the grocery store. Jemel Roberson was shot in the back by police after he apprehended an active gunman attempting to shoot up a Chicago area nightclub. Everett Palmer was killed by prison

guards after voluntarily turning himself in for a DUI arrest. The senseless and needless deaths are seemingly endless, a river of blood fueled by a reservoir of violence from unaccountable and insufficiently trained law enforcement officers.

This crisis has been permitted to fester by a greater cultural disregard for human dignity. A culture born of many factors but thriving on the persistent war on drugs and dehumanizing of those struggling with addiction or the relentless grip of poverty. The us-against-them attitude engendered by these cultural traits has given rise to the most incarcerated society in world history and the bloodiest police culture in the modern world. A reality incompatible with freedom, liberty, and equality for all.

The foundational principles from which the American republic was born have long faced threats which jeopardized her continued unity and existence - an oppressive British monarchy, slavery and insurrection, Nazism, racism, and segregation. And, unfortunately, the spilling of American blood has oft precipitated America's willingness to rise and meet these existential challenges head on. Blood has been the catalyst for change and the price of the American experiment. We pray that no more American blood need spill before today's threats are overcome. The millions of Americans gathered in the streets across the country demand change. It is incumbent upon this Congress to act.

Accountability, redressability, and transparency must be the pillars of any path forward. Empathy and compassion must permeate our law enforcement structures. Congress must consider administrative and criminal processes for the review of police misconduct. Plans that ensure that violent officers are not allowed to continue to wield the power of the state need to be discussed. Mechanisms for review and oversight have to be developed. And barriers to accountability, like qualified immunity, must be removed. We welcome the opportunity for our clients to tell you their stories and for us to discuss policies and strategies for action with you.

America is at a turning point like no other in the past few decades. The action, or inaction, of the following months will be judged by generations the world over. It is time to address our collective failures and move this country forward on a path to achieving the principles of liberty, freedom, and equality for all.

James Madison once warned, “Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit. In a society under the forms of which the stronger faction can readily unite and oppress the weaker, anarchy may as truly be said to reign as in a state of nature, where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger.”

We invite you to end the anarchy to which our society has for too long turned a blind eye.

Sincerely,

S. Lee Merritt, Esq.

Daniel N. Purtell, Esq.

John J. Coyle, Esq.

Mark V. Maguire, Esq.

MERRITT LAW FIRM

MCELDREW YOUNG PURTELL