

ADVANCING JUSTICE, SAFETY, & ACCOUNTABILITY

Racial Justice & Police Violence Policy Statement

The deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and too many other Black people at the hands of police are deeply intertwined with our nation's long history of racial injustice and with our founding origins as a nation that prospered through the enslavement of Black people. As one of the nation's oldest women's organizations with a longstanding mission to eliminate racism and empower women, we are devastated by the police violence and systemic racism that continue to exist in our communities. Unless critical steps are taken, the trauma of racial violence will continue and reverberate across the next generations of children and families for whom we provide child care, job training, housing, and safety from domestic and sexual violence.

YWCA's on-the-ground presence in communities where police violence is happening, our valued relationships with local law enforcement, and our long-standing commitment to racial justice and gender equity provide us with a unique perspective on reforms that are needed to address the immediate and growing crisis of police violence. We see the moral imperative for change demanded in this moment and the ways in which women of color are criminalized, profiled, and harmed by systems, laws, and policies that are supposed to provide support and protection. We also recognize the critical role that law enforcement often plays in protecting women and children from domestic and sexual violence and frequently partner with government institutions to aid many of the more than 2.3 million women, children, and families that we serve each year. It is from this vantage point that YWCA both advocates for specific, concrete, and long-overdue reforms to ensure that not another Black life is taken by police violence *and* unequivocally affirms our long-standing and valued partnership with law enforcement and government institutions.

This Policy Statement sets forth three core policy priorities that YWCA will advance to address the on-going racial justice crisis:

1. Enacting meaningful, evidence-informed legislation to end police violence against people of color and historically marginalized groups, increase transparency, and ensure accountability
2. Formally recognizing racism and police violence as a public health crisis, with concurrent investment of resources in social service, behavioral health, and other programs and services that strengthen communities and create justice and well-being
3. Expanding gendered narratives to ensure that reform efforts address the unique ways that women and girls of color experience police violence

Public support for implementing reforms to end police violence and systemic racism has never been higher, and as a nation we have decades of studies, recommendations, and best practices to guide us in this effort.

Change is possible, and the time to act is now.

YWCA PRIORITY: End Police Violence, Increase Transparency, & Ensure Accountability

On June 1, 2020, YWCA USA joined the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and over 450 other national civil rights organizations on a [letter](#) outlining accountability principles that must be adopted to address systemic racism in policing across America. These principles represent essential first steps to:

- **End police violence** by setting a national standard restricting the use of force, prohibiting racial profiling, banning dangerous practices like chokeholds and no-knock warrants, and eliminating the transfer of military-grade equipment to state and local law enforcement
- **Increase transparency** by establishing a national, open, and transparent police misconduct registry of all federal, state, and local law enforcement officers that includes misconduct complaints, discipline records, termination records, and records of certification
- **Hold law enforcement accountable when violence occurs** by eliminating the judge-made doctrine of qualified immunity from civil rights actions, and by including a “reckless” standard in 18 U.S.C. Section 242 to enable federal prosecutors to pursue criminal charges for civil rights violations

Any serious attempt to pass meaningful, comprehensive police reform legislation must include these principles, which are supported by years of studies, recommendations, and best practices. YWCA will also support additional steps that further the primary goals of decreasing police violence against people of color and historically marginalized groups, increasing transparency, and ensuring accountability for police violence against people of color.

YWCA PRIORITY: Recognize Racism and Police Violence as a Public Health Crisis and Invest Resources Accordingly

As the voices of protest in the streets of our country have made clear, police accountability is a necessary step, but it is only a first step. This moment also requires us to reimagine what is needed to ensure justice, well-being, and safety for all communities, and to right-size the role of policing to achieve that vision.

YWCA urges policymakers at all levels to join the growing number of local city councils, state policymakers, public health associations, and medical organizations that recognize racism as the public crisis that it is, and to invest public resources accordingly. There is rapidly growing consensus that police are called on to respond to situations that are better handled by other agencies and professionals, and that a law enforcement response is often less effective, more expensive, and more dangerous than social service, behavioral health, or other interventions. Moreover, there is growing acknowledgement that such alternatives to policing have long been underfunded in Black and Brown communities, and that heightened policing of historically marginalized communities perpetuates racial disparities and police violence.

Recognizing racism and police violence as a public health crisis means increasing federal, state, and local investments in schools, child care and early learning, trauma-informed care, mental and behavioral health, affordable housing, job training, and other programs and services that promote social determinants of health. This is an essential step in strengthening communities and building communities that support people is key to creating justice and wellbeing. Such a shift in funding priorities would directly address deeply embedded inequities that perpetuate racial injustice, and would reform the systems, structures, and policies that fuel the crisis of police violence.

YWCA PRIORITY: Recognize and Address the Unique and Specific Ways that Women of Color Experience Police Violence

Too often, the needs and experiences of women and girls of color are left out of the public and policy conversations about police violence and racial justice. As documented in YWCA’s 2017 report [We Deserve Safety: Ending the Criminalization of Women and Girls of Color](#) and 2020 update, women and girls of color experience racial profiling and criminalization in many of the same ways as men and boys of color: outside of the home in traffic stops, airport security screenings, border checkpoints, schools, and other interactions with government institutions and law enforcement. But women and girls of color also experience profiling, criminalization, and police violence in unique ways—inside their homes and other spaces that should be safe, in front of children, and when they are in need of help. From police responses to domestic violence and other threats in their homes and neighborhoods, to the policing of pregnancy and motherhood, to their experiences of “driving while female,” women and girls of color experience criminalization, racial profiling, and police violence in ways that are overlooked by the current policy and media narratives.

It is imperative that reform efforts recognize and address these well-documented experiences of women and girls of color. This requires all of us --advocates, policymakers, members of the press, and community members-- to expand the gendered narratives about police violence so that policy solutions to advance racial justice and safety are responsive to the experiences and concerns of women and girls of color.

THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW

As a nation, we stand at a critical moment in time—and YWCA cannot and will not let it be a passing moment.

Over the past weeks, we have seen people across the country and from all walks of life take to the streets and call for police accountability and an end to systemic racism. Public attitudes toward law enforcement and police reform make the call for change even more clear. A May 2020 poll found strong bipartisan support for reforms, with nearly 9 in 10 supporting police body cameras, 4 in 5 supporting an early warning system to identify problematic officers, and two-thirds believing that neck restraints should be banned,ⁱ while a prior 2016 study found that 79% of Americans support independent investigations of police misconduct.ⁱⁱ

Moreover, 67% of Americans—including 63% of white Americans—now believe that Black individuals are treated less fairly than white individuals when dealing with the police.ⁱⁱⁱ And a 2020 poll found that 57% of Americans believe, in a dangerous situation, that the police are more likely to use excessive force against a Black person than against a white person, an increase of 24 points since 2014.^{iv}

Changes in state and local law and policy have been following suit. More than half of states^v are on record with legislation explicitly prohibiting racial profiling, and court cases across the country have found racial profiling tactics to be unconstitutional. Support for data collection for all law enforcement activities is also growing among state legislatures. Currently, 19 states require mandatory data collection for all law enforcement-initiated traffic stops.^{vi} Further, 15 states require analysis of racial profiling data.^{vii}

These are promising steps, but a national response and national standards are needed. The current patchwork of laws and policies leaves people of color at heightened risk of police violence depending on where they live, work, or travel—and the state, county, or zip code that people of color happen to find themselves in and the branch of law enforcement they happen to interact with should not determine the level of threat they face.

Public support for taking comprehensive and meaningful steps to end police violence and systemic racism has never been higher and, as a nation, we have decades of studies, recommendations, and best practices to draw on as a blueprint to guide us in this effort. Change is possible, and the time to act is now.

ⁱ Sanders, Linley. YouGov. (1 June 2020). “What Police Reform Does America Support?” Retrieved from <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2020/06/01/police-reform-america-poll>.

ⁱⁱ Ekins, Emily. Cato Institute. (7 December 2016). “Policing in America: Understanding Public Attitudes Toward the Police. Results from a National Survey.” Retrieved from <https://www.cato.org/survey-reports/policing-america>.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/21/from-police-to-parole-black-and-white-americans-differ-widely-in-their-views-of-criminal-justice-system/ft_19-05-16_racecriminaljustice_2/ June 4, 2020 From Police to Parole, Black and White Americans Differ Widely in their View of the Criminal Justice System

^{iv} Monmouth University. (2 June 2020). “Protestors’ Anger Justified Even If Actions May Not Be.” Retrieved from https://www.monmouth.edu/polling-institute/reports/monmouthpoll_us_060220/.

^v NAACP. (September 2014). “Born Suspect: Stop-and-Frisk Abuses & the Continued Fight to End Racial Profiling in America. Retrieved from https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/naacp/Born_Suspect_Report_final_web.pdf

^{vi} Including CA, CT, IL, KS, LA, MD, MA, MO, MT, NC, NE, NJ, OR, RI, SC, TX, VT, WA, and WV. Policing Project. NYU School of Law. (30 September 2019). “It’s time to start collecting stop data: A case for comprehensive statewide legislation. Retrieved from: <https://www.policingproject.org/news-main/2019/9/27/its-time-to-start-collecting-stop-data-a-case-for-comprehensive-statewide-legislation>.

^{vii} Including AL, CA, CT, FL, IL, KS, LA, MD, MA, MO, NE, NV, RI, TX and WV. NAACP. (September 2014). “Born Suspect: Stop-and-Frisk Abuses & the Continued Fight to End Racial Profiling in America. Retrieved from https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/naacp/Born_Suspect_Report_final_web.pdf.