

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD FROM 112 YWCAs

THE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

June 17, 2020

Dear Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan, and Members of the Committee:



YWCA USA

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We, the undersigned **112 YWCA's from 37 states across the United States**, thank you for hosting today's markup of the Justice in Policing Act of 2020 (H.R. 7120) as well as last week's hearing on policing practices and law enforcement accountability, and for accepting this statement for the hearing record. We submit this letter today to urge support and passage of the Justice in Policing Act (H.R. 7120) as amended and thank you for taking an important first step toward police accountability.

YWCA's longstanding mission to eliminate racism and empower women is the guiding star that unites our voices and our work. As a national organization founded in 1858, we have been at the forefront of the most pressing social issues - from voting rights to civil rights, from affordable housing to pay equity, from violence prevention to health care reform. Today, we combine programming and advocacy to generate institutional change in three key areas: racial justice and civil rights, empowerment and economic advancement of women and girls, and health and safety of women and girls.

Today, our nation is reckoning with the continuing manifestations of an origin story rooted in the enslavement of Black people. The deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and too many other Black people at the hands of police are rooted in this history, and are happening in communities we serve. We are outraged by the devastating impact of police violence and systemic racism in our communities and know that the traumatic impact will continue to reverberate for the next generation of children and families for whom we provide child care, job training and STEM programs, housing, leadership development, and more.

And we say this as organizations who value and rely on effective law enforcement in the work that we do. As YWCA USA's CEO, Alejandra Y. Castillo, noted in her statement to the committee on June 11, 2020, YWCA approaches these issues from a unique vantage point. We both see the moral imperative for change demanded in this moment *and* recognize the critical role that law enforcement so often plays in protecting women and children from domestic and sexual violence. We see the ways in which Black women and other women of color are criminalized, profiled, and harmed by systems, laws, and policies that are *supposed* to provide support and protection—and at the same time

we rely on those very same systems, laws, and policies to aid so many of the more than 2.3 million women, children, and families that we serve each year. We see clearly how racism shows up in all facets of life, and that the very same law enforcement, social service, education, healthcare, and court systems that in some situations protect our clients are also deeply entrenched with systemic and structural racism, and that they fuel racially disparate contact with child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal justice systems.

Together, we unequivocally affirm our long-standing and valued partnership with law enforcement *and* affirm that we cannot and must not allow another Black life to be taken from us by police violence.



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YWCA CALLS FOR ACTION

The days of blue-ribbon committees, commissions, and task forces to explore issues are over. As a nation, we have decades of studies, recommendations, and best practices to draw on. The time to act is now. And today, YWCA calls on Congress to implement concrete solutions to address deeply embedded structures and systems that give racism its malignant hold on our communities.

Accordingly, together we urge Congress to:

1. Act now to pass *comprehensive* police accountability measures such as the Justice in Policing Act (H.R. 7120).

The Justice in Policing Act takes important, foundational steps to implement long overdue police accountability measures to address underlying systems, policies, and structures that reinforce and embed racism in our justice system. YWCA is committed to the success of the Justice in Policing Act and is particularly grateful for the following provisions, which are of particular importance to us:

- A ban on racial profiling by federal, state, and local law enforcement;
- Mechanisms to strengthen pattern and practice investigations by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and state attorneys general;
- The creation of a national police misconduct registry;
- Limitations on the transfer of military equipment to local law enforcement agencies; and
- Improved data collection on the use of force by law enforcement.

As this legislation moves forward, we urge the Committee to implement the recommended changes detailed in the June 16, 2020, letter from the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights. Strengthening this legislation now is critical, and we fully support the recommendations regarding qualified immunity, pattern and practice investigations, color of law

prosecutions, transparency, data collection, ending militarized policing, funding, and school resource officers that are detailed in this correspondence.

2. Expand gendered narratives to recognize and address the unique and specific ways that women of color experience police violence.

Recognizing that women of color are frequently overlooked in discussions surrounding police violence and criminal justice reform, YWCA USA issued [*We Deserve Safety: Ending the Criminalization of Women and Girls of Color*](#) in 2017. This report documents the unique and particular ways in which girls and women of color experience racial profiling and criminalization across a range of situations and settings.

Like men of color, women of color commonly experience racial profiling and criminalization outside of the home—in traffic stops, airport security screening, border checkpoints, schools, and other interactions with government institutions and law enforcement. Recent incidents make clear, however, that women of color also experience profiling, criminalization, and police violence in their homes and other spaces that should be safe, in front of children, and when in need of help. From police responses to domestic violence and threats in their homes and neighborhoods, to the policing of pregnancy and motherhood, to their experiences of “driving while female,” girls and women of color experience criminalization and racial profiling by law enforcement in ways that are overlooked by the current policy narrative.

Moreover, girls and women of color routinely experience violence and death at the hands of police. As we document in *We Deserve Safety*, before Breonna Taylor was killed during the execution of a no-knock warrant, Dajerria Becton, a 15-year-old Black girl attending a pool party, was thrown to the ground, kneeled on, and handcuffed by a Texas police officer responding to reports of trespassing in an upscale neighborhood; the officer also drew his weapon when friends attempted to help her. Janissa Valdez, a 12-year-old Latina student in Texas, was body-slammed to the ground by a school police officer. Illinois police used a taser on Lucinda White, a Black woman who was eight months pregnant, during a dispute over a parking lot fender-bender. Chaumtoli Huq, a Muslim Bangladeshi American woman was roughly handcuffed and forcibly dragged down a street in Manhattan when she refused to leave the sidewalk by a restaurant while waiting for her husband to return from taking their two small children to the restroom.

We are outraged by such police violence, and urge Congress to ensure that any legislation to enact police and criminal justice system reforms is responsive to police violence against women of color.



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3. Recognize racism as a public health crisis and invest federal resources accordingly.

YWCA joins local city councils, state policymakers, public health associations, and medical organizations in recognizing racism as a public health crisis, and we urge Congress to do the same. While the Justice in Policing Act is a significant first step toward instituting much needed reform, Congress must not stop here. As our nation joins the on-going conversation to reimagine policing and our justice system, we urge Congress to recognize racism as the public health crisis that it is, and to invest federal resources accordingly.

What does it look like to take this step? At the federal level, we believe this means increasing federal resources and 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 but have long been underfunded in Black and Brown communities. 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 reform the systems, structures, and policies that are the backdrop against which the crisis of police violence and brutality is playing out.

We stand at a critical moment in time—and we cannot and will not let it be a passing moment. The time to take bold action and speak out against injustice is now. We remain committed to working with law enforcement partners, public service agencies, local and state governments, and Congress as together we confront systemic racism and chart a new path forward that cultivates equity and safety for all.

We thank the Committee for its swift attention to the Justice in Policing Act (H.R. 7120) and urge all Members to support this bill as amended so we may finally achieve equity and justice for all. Please do not hesitate to contact Pam Yuen, YWCA USA Government Relations Manager, at pyuen@ywca.org or 202-559-7022, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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ALABAMA

YWCA Central Alabama

ALASKA

YWCA Alaska



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