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Statement from Tarrant County Black Democrats Regarding Ongoing Law Enforcement Interactions and Engagement with Black Americans

We are hurting and we are afraid.

As Black Americans, we are sadly taught early in life to expect that there are a different set of rules that apply to us and our lives. The events in recent weeks have unfortunately validated this lesson. The stories we heard from our grandparents and parents about their fight for equal protection under the law is unfortunately a story we will now have to continue telling our children and grandchildren. Ahmaud Arbery was stalked and murdered because he “looked suspicious.” Breonna Taylor was murdered in her home after a botched police raid. George Floyd was murdered over an allegation of a fake \$20 bill. Christian Cooper was threatened because he asked a woman to (lawfully) leash her dog.

In the Dallas-Fort Worth area, we still remember Botham Jean, Jonathan Paul, and Atatiana Jefferson.

These stories demonstrate the weaponization of law enforcement and law enforcement powers against people of color. These names and their stories are a constant reminder of two things: 1) As Black Americans, we are often times presumed guilty until proven innocent; and 2) those who have sworn to “serve and protect” are sometimes the very ones we need protection from. While we certainly do not believe that all police are bad, we similarly cannot say that all police care about the lives of people of color. The names mentioned above reflect a modicum but not even close to the number of innocent people of color that have fallen victim to our current system of law enforcement.

The constant and senseless police misconduct and extreme force that has affected Black Americans across this country is not a Republican or Democrat issue. It is a human issue. The protests across the country, and particularly in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, demonstrate that Americans are tired of this abuse against Black bodies at the hands of the system that should be protecting them. These protests and demonstrations are an outcry for real and sensible actions to truly bring about law enforcement reform. Americans are tired of rhetoric and talk, and want meaningful change to ensure that the list of innocent people of color murdered by law enforcement does not continue.

Therefore, in an effort to work with local government to bring about meaningful and systemic changes to our local law enforcement system, the Tarrant County Black Democrats requests the following actions be taken by the Mayor, the City Council, the City Manager/Administrator, and local law enforcement agencies:

1. We request that the City hold public hearings to inform the public and permit public comments and feedback prior to the final vote and/or approval of any labor agreements between the City and a local law enforcement agency. We request that any considered agreement be made publicly available for review prior to any such hearing through the City's main website page. To the extent applicable and possible, we request that the hearings be broadcast through the City's television station and website, and through local broadcast stations.
2. We request a public hearing to discuss and provide input regarding local law enforcement agencies policies and procedures related to the use of deadly force and de-escalation techniques involving citizens. We request that such policies and procedures be made publicly available for review prior to any such hearing through the City's main website page.
3. To the extent that one does not already exist, we request that a Community Oversight Board (or Police Civilian Board) be created. The Board's membership should be comprised of individuals nominated and elected by their respective community. For example, in the event the Board is comprised of one individual from each city council district, then we request that an individual is publicly nominated and voted on by the citizens of that district for membership on the Board. Any individuals holding membership on the Board should not have any financial contracts or agreements with the City or a City-affiliated agency.
4. We request that the Community Oversight Board (or Police Civilian Board) be granted review and enforcement powers, including the granting of subpoena power to the Board for the requesting of law enforcement case files and records, and the ability to review and provide public comments and feedback regarding any agreements between the City and law enforcement agencies. We also ask that a member of the Community Oversight Board participate in any internal review or audit of law enforcement personnel actions relating to any allegation of excessive force, civil rights violation, or any police misconduct alleged to have involved a private citizen.

While the above requests are not an exhaustive list of all of the changes needed to address the current issues between law enforcement and communities of color, we do believe these are short-term solutions that can begin laying the foundation for future change. The issues between law enforcement and communities of color were not created overnight, nor will they similarly be resolved as quickly. However, through all stakeholders working together and implementing tangible actions to address these problems, we can ensure that the stories of Black Americans having to fight for equal protection under the law and at the hands of law enforcement stop with this generation.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to the Tarrant County Black Democrats.

Hopeful,

Eric Igwe, President

Tarrant County Black Democrats