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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the NEA across the nation who are dedicated to teaching, supporting, and nurturing students regardless of their race or ethnicity, thank you for holding tomorrow's oversight hearing on policing practices and law enforcement accountability. We appreciate this opportunity to submit comments for the record.

NEA members strive to prepare students to be good citizens and contributing members of their communities. But these opportunities are only accessible to the extent that our nation can keep students and their families safe from police brutality, a particular danger in African American communities.

Educators know that preparing students for the responsibilities of citizenship means teaching them to appreciate a fundamental principle of our democracy: All of us are equal and deserving of protections under our nation's system of laws. However, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others by police officers who behave as if they are above the laws they have sworn to uphold—and the ongoing, systemic murders of black men, women, and children by police in countless communities—make a mockery of that principle. Our students see the reality before their eyes, and even worse, many of them are subjected to police brutality themselves or have family members or friends who have been victimized.

Going to school or returning home from an after-school job or visiting friends or simply going to a cookout or a concert—or a playground—should not put students' lives at risk. But sadly, in communities of color, police officers who have taken an oath to serve and protect often view their fellow citizens as the enemy. This means that simply going about the most mundane, everyday tasks can result in harassment, or even brutal, senseless murder.

George Floyd's death was horrific, but it was not an isolated incident. Between February 23 and May 27 of this year, four African American men and one African American woman were killed by current and former police officers in incidents now under investigation. Although it is this recent spate of killings that has commanded public attention, other deaths have occurred over the same period that most of us will never learn of. In fact, a 2019 study published in a National Academy of Sciences journal found that about 1 in every 1,000 black men can expect to be killed by police.

The world saw Mr. Floyd as the most recent victim in an ongoing war on people of color that began with our nation's founding. This is why protesters, often led by students and other young people, continue to raise their voices in anger and to demand a different future. They are decrying Mr. Floyd's murder and police brutality and calling for structural change in policing policies and practices.

NEA members are active in the fight for social and racial justice, both in schools and in society at large. As such, NEA is a member of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (LCCR), and we join coalition members in urging this committee to examine and recommend policy changes in use of force, racial profiling, data collection, and training of police officers. Without federal reform, there is no reason to expect that police brutality will end; indeed, we can expect that it will continue with impunity, especially as the spotlight shifts and the news cycle changes.

Specifically, we support provisions such as:

- An end to no-knock warrants;
- A federal use of force standard that mandates employing force only when necessary, as a last resort, and after exhausting all other reasonable options;
- Mandatory de-escalation training for police;
- A prohibition on the use of techniques such as chokeholds, knee-to-neck restraints, and other potentially fatal maneuvers;
- A prohibition of racial and religious profiling;
- The end of the transfer of military weapons to state and local police agencies through the Department of Defense 1033 program and other programs;
- An update of the federal criminal civil rights statute that would allow prosecutors to bring criminal charges against officers who violate individuals' civil rights; and
- A national public registry of law enforcement officers that would inform hiring decisions.

We also encourage members of this committee to carefully examine the Justice in Policing Act, introduced in the House by Congressional Black Caucus Chair Karen Bass and Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, and introduced in the Senate by Senators Cory Booker and Kamala Harris. This legislation contains many starting measures that would help to end police brutality and restore the faith that we want—and need—to place in law enforcement agencies.

We are at a turning point, and we are called upon to end police brutality now. NEA members are grateful for this committee's hearing on and attention to this issue, because educators are committed to ensuring that all students, in every community, have access to the opportunities they deserve to learn and thrive in our nation. We cannot afford to waste the momentum of this difficult time, and we cannot risk the possibility that another black family will be left to mourn a loved one's senseless death at the hands of those we are supposed to trust.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association