



## Independent CITIZEN POLICE REVIEW BOARD

City of Pittsburgh  
816 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400  
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USA

April 30, 2021

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Chair

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The Hon. Theresa Kail-Smith  
President, Pittsburgh City Council  
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Messrs. and Madame:

Nationally, the tension between communities and police has reached an untenable level. In Pittsburgh, efforts to re-define policing tactics have produced good ideas and resulted in an ongoing re-alignment of public safety goals and responses to interactions between police and citizens. The continuing loss of life during police encounters with citizens has generated varying levels of community responses.

Since 1997 this Board has presided over hundreds of investigations related to police conduct and has witnessed organizational reform in the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police. The deaths of Mr. George Floyd, Philando Castille, Duante Wright, Adam Toledo and many others, have elevated the public's concern regarding civilian deaths, particularly of African Americans, pursuant to the use of lethal force by police officers.

Each incident must be judged on its own facts. The Washington Post reports that since January 1, 2015, 6241 people have died during or immediately after a police encounter, many of which were initiated during a traffic stop. That is an average of more than 1000 civilian deaths per year as a result of police action. The National Law Enforcement Memorial reports that for that same period, an average of 229 police officers are killed in the line of duty each year. These numbers reflect a tragic loss of life which demand the attention and intervention of policymakers and all citizens.

Recently the Black Political Empowerment Project, through its Chairman and CEO, Tim Stevens, called for local police departments to review and revise as appropriate their use of force policies and to suspend fourteen (14) enumerated "routine" traffic stops. We appreciate the urgency of B-PEP's appeal to law enforcement as a means to protect civilians, particularly African American men. While we will not denounce routine traffic stops, we believe a comprehensive review of all routine stops is needed.

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The Board promotes practices that will reduce troublesome encounters and confrontations between civilians and police officers. We cannot sanction selective or restrained law enforcement that potentially places others at risk or disregards the law. Neither do we condone unlawful civilian conduct that places others in harm's way and attracts police attention. We do encourage the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police to review its training and professional development of supervisors to assure officers' discretionary actions are informed and reflect competent judgement, especially as related to the use of reasonable, lawful force. We also encourage the Bureau, and all local police agencies, to review their policies related to patrol officers' use of pretextual stops, trickery and ruse; nothing is more destructive to community trust than dishonesty.

During this difficult time in the community/police relationship, our common goal must be threat and risk-reduction through de-escalation tactics and as appropriate, minimized enforcement contact between police and civilians. All interactions should begin with a basic respect for human life and proceed with the dignity deserved by all individuals, each as a worthy human being.

On behalf of the Board, I thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Yours truly,



Emma Lucas-Darby, PhD  
Chair

cc: Tim Stevens, President and CEO, B-PEP

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