

June 11, 2020

Dear Vice President Biden,

We write to you in a time of nationwide mourning. Once again, our country is reeling from the killings of several Black people at the hands of the police, and is being forced to contend with a truth that Black communities have always known: that violence and racism pervades and defines our policing and criminal justice systems. That the murders of George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Philando Castile and so many more are symptoms of a far larger problem, one that has made the very act of being Black in this country--driving while Black, jogging while Black, even voting while Black--into a liability and a danger.

Black people are disproportionately stopped, searched, arrested, and killed by the police. Black people disproportionately fall victim to mandatory minimum sentencing, punitive school discipline policies, predatory cash bail, and other practices that feed a prison industrial complex intent on locking people in cages. Black people are disproportionately likely to get sick and die from heart disease and diabetes, from environmental pollution, and now from the coronavirus. These inequities are a tragedy and an outrage, the outcomes of a system designed to subjugate Black communities and other communities of color. Now more than ever, we need a President ready to fight for true, transformative justice.

In the course of your political career, you have designed and endorsed policies that have significantly exacerbated these problems. As a Senator, you not only supported but in many cases authored and championed laws that expanded mass incarceration, increased police powers, and exacerbated racial disparities in surveillance and sentencing.¹ These laws broke apart Black communities and robbed many young Black people of a future. They are a part of the history that has led us to this moment, and their ongoing fallout has contributed to the outpourings of grief and anger we are seeing today.

As the presumptive Democratic nominee for President, you have a moral responsibility in this moment. Making amends for the harm you've caused is an important first step, but it is no longer enough. We acknowledge that you've taken some positive positions--including calling for a federal ban on police chokeholds--but these too are far from sufficient. In order to rise to this occasion, you must put forward a transformative and comprehensive policing and criminal justice platform that shifts how we approach public safety and allows Black communities in particular to thrive.

¹ "[Joe Biden's long record supporting the war on drugs and mass incarceration, explained.](#)" Vox, July 2019.

As progressive organizations representing millions of active members across the country--all of whom want justice for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor--we call on you to make the following commitments:

- Immediately incorporate the policies laid out by the [Movement for Black Lives](#) into your campaign platform, and announce the specific changes publicly. This includes their critical demands for interventions that will end state violence against Black people, end the economic exploitation of Black communities, advance reparations, and defund police, prisons, and weaponry so we can fully fund healthcare, housing, education, and environmental justice.²
- This past week in USA Today³ and New York Magazine⁴, you once again leaned into your support of the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program by asking for an investment of \$300 million. We are here to tell you, unequivocally, that that is NOT the answer. The COPS program has directly contributed to the increased size and scope of policing in cities across the country, and the subsequent stream of violence and killings perpetrated by law enforcement on Black people in particular. Because of its intention to legitimize police forces through “community policing” the program resulted in an expansion of training programs that included the combat and threat neutralization techniques that led to the horrific killings of children like Tamir Rice. The COVID-19 crisis and accompanying economic loss, paired with the brazen and violent behavior of police forces, has demonstrated the need for a nationwide reimagining of public safety that does not include further allocation of federal resources to police. We ask that you revise your platform to ensure that the federal government permanently ends and ceases any further appropriation of funding to local law enforcement in any form, whether it be money for trainings, equipment, hiring, re-hiring, overtime, etc. including all programs under the COPS program, and redirect those and additional resources towards much needed community-led and community-controlled public safety efforts.

We make these demands first and foremost because we seek justice for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor--as well as all the other Black lives lost--and policies like these are what justice looks like in practice. But we also make them with an eye toward the November election. Throughout his presidency, but particularly in the last few weeks, we've seen Donald Trump fan

² The [Vision for Justice 2020 agenda](#) compiled by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and several of our own organizations provides another detailed resource to inform your campaign's response. It proposes a “holistic framework that expands our view of public safety and prioritizes upfront investments in non carceral programs and social services, including additional resources for education, housing, employment, health care, social-emotional supports, and other public benefits.”

³ Biden, Joe. 'We must urgently root out systemic racism, from policing to housing to opportunity'. www.usatoday.com, USA Today, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/06/10/biden-root-out-systemic-racism-not-just-divisive-trump-talk-column/5327631002/>.

⁴ Kilgore, Ed. 'Biden supports reforming, not defunding the police'. www.nymag.com, New York Magazine, 2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/06/biden-wants-to-reform-not-defund-police.html>.

the flames of racism and uplift the voices of white supremacists. He has declared war on protesters demanding racial justice, and ordered governors, police forces, and the military to “dominate” us in the streets. He is unfit for office, and we must defeat him--and the Republican Party that enables him--at the ballot box in November.

You cannot win the election without the enthusiastic support of Black voters, and how you act in this moment of crisis will play a big role in determining how Black voters--and all voters concerned with racial justice--respond to your candidacy. A “return to normalcy” will not suffice. For too many Black people, “normalcy” has meant violence, discrimination, and fear. What we actually need is a visionary departure from “normal.” We need a restorative justice system that values every human life, and enshrines equity above all. We need leadership that will fight every day to align this country with its highest ideals. We are counting on you to demonstrate that leadership.

Signed,

Black Voters Matter (National)

Black Leaders Organizing Communities (WI)

National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls

Justice Teams Network

BYP100

Drug Policy Action

Working Families Party (National)

Flint Rising (MI)

215 People’s Alliance (PA)

Action NC

Detroit Action

Action Now Chicago

Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment

Mijente (National)

RootsAction (National)

United We Dream Action (National)

Center for Popular Democracy Action (National)

People's Action (National)

Arkansas Community Organizations

CASA in Action (PA, VI and MD)

Churches United for Fair Housing Action (NY)

Communities Creating Opportunity Action (MO)

Dream Defenders

Everyday People PAC (Seed the Vote & Generation Rising - National)

Hoosier Action (IN)

Equality Labs (National)

Living United for Change in Arizona (AZ)

Jewish Voice for Peace Action

Maine People's Alliance

League of United Latin American Citizens (National)

Make the Road Action (National)

Maryland Communities United

New Florida Majority

New Virginia Majority

New York Communities for Change

Ohio Organizing Collaborative

One Pennsylvania

Organization United for Respect

Organize Florida

Organizing in the Land of Enchantment (NM)

Our Revolution

Progressive Democrats of America (PDA)

Rights and Democracy (VT and NH)

Step Up for Action (LA)

Student Action (National)

Sunrise Movement (National)

Texas Organizing Project

Take Action Minnesota

United for a New Economy Action (CO)

Voices of Community Activists and Leaders-NY Action Fund (NY)

Workers Defense Project Action Fund (TX)

Working Washington

Policing and Social Justice Project