

Reproaction



IVRJ  
Interfaith Voices 4 Reproductive Justice



Dear Local Elected Official:

As Black reproductive justice advocates, we are profoundly hurt, angered, saddened and appalled at the tactics and response to our communities' calls for justice, humanity and dignity. This moment, although sparked by the latest extrajudicial killing of Black individuals in our communities (**George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Nina Pop, David McAtee, and countless others, some whose names we will never know**), is the result of historic and egregious injustices that have left our neighborhoods under-resourced, our people over-criminalized, and our families traumatized.

However, this moment requires us to be brave enough to imagine a more just future and to be bold enough to do what is needed for fundamental change that shifts power. Black women and gender-expansive people have a long history of boldly confronting challenging moments with the ingenuity and grace to create paths forward that leaves our future generations in better positions. This letter is an invitation to envision an intersectional response to this uprising that catapults change, rather than deepening trauma and violence against Black people.

During a time of prolonged social isolation, unparalleled unemployment, and a public health pandemic that disproportionately impacts our communities, the response we need from our leadership is one of compassion that recognizes both the extreme pain of this moment in history, as well as our right to protest. As a reproductive justice community, we believe that it is a human right for families to live without the fear of police violence, and offer an alternative path other than one of state-sanctioned violence and a militarized police force in this pivotal moment.

### **Our Demands and Expectations:**

#### **1. Create a unit of mental health providers, therapists and other practitioners that can meet protestors instead of police or military personnel.**

We cannot overstate the trauma of repeatedly watching the loss of Black lives on video, media, and through personal experiences. After centuries of systemic violence that has harmed and continues to harm Black communities, it is important to recognize and respond to the trauma and pain that this violence causes to our collective minds. It further harms Black communities to have the police force, who are the perpetrators of violence, be sent in mass to “crowd control,” likening it to pouring gasoline on a fire. **We instead demand that our communities be met with trusted leaders, elected officials, and mental health professionals who use a trauma-informed approach to better respond to and affirm the humanity of protestors and our needs as a community.**

#### **2. Local elected officials should present steps to address racism and sexism in the criminal legal system, including reforms around police stops, use of force, ticketing, sentencing and ending bail.**

Saying that you are bothered or upset about George Floyd is not enough. Asking for peaceful protest and patience is not enough. We have lived through centuries of oppression, inequality and violence. We marched

peacefully, took a knee peacefully, contacted elected officials and voted peacefully, and we prayed peacefully. But our requests went unanswered. It is the responsibility of our local and state elected officials to put into motion a viable plan for ending state-sanctioned police violence, bias in the criminal legal system, and the over-policing of Black communities. **We ask that your calls for peace be coupled with your plans for change.** We as a reproductive justice movement, along with our partners, including the [Movement For Black Lives](#) have outlined ways to address structural racism.

**3. Invest in affordable housing, address food insecurity, and expand healthcare coverage by diverting/defunding police budgets.**

The communities who have suffered the worst impacts of COVID-19 are the same neighborhoods in which racism and white supremacy have had the deepest repercussions. Elected officials must recognize that the systems that allow the police to brutalize our communities are the same systems that make it difficult for us to access basic needs and live our fullest lives. **We ask that the money used by local, state, and federal agencies to fund militarized police forces be redirected to provide sustainable resources to Black communities.**

**4. Ban the use of tear gas, flash grenades/bangs, rubber bullets, pepper spray and other “non-lethal” methods to clear out non-violent protesters.**

The use of military-grade weapons on unarmed Americans peacefully protesting is an ironic illustration of the grievances that Black communities have for so long lamented. It is a human right to peacefully assemble and voice protest against systems of oppression. Using the methods above only creates more harm while also denying the rights of people to be able to freely express themselves. **We ask that local governments sever their contracts with federal programs that provide military equipment to local law enforcement and that local governments agree to prohibit the use of military-grade weapons as well as other non-lethal methods on nonviolent protestors.**

**5. Ban Curfews**

Curfews create more tension and put more people at risk for incarceration. The United States prides itself on being a “free” country, but the use of curfews to quell civil unrest further demonstrates that certain freedoms are not available to Black people, or the allies who join us in peaceful protest. Curfews should be avoided because they create a new opportunity for indiscriminate police violence. Local officials should avoid the use of curfews in an effort to de-escalate an already tense situation.

Driving out anti-Blackness and white supremacy is a long road that requires both courageous policies and large scale cultural shift, that goes beyond addressing police violence, but rather calls us to redesign and examine our social fabric. Our work centers a human rights framework and asserts that all people have the right to economic, social and political power and resources to make informed decisions about our bodies, families, and our communities in all areas of our lives. We have a right to protest. We have a right to live without surveillance. We have a right to live in sustainable communities. And, we have a right to good health. We invite you to participate in a conversation with us to create lasting structural change, that addresses the current uprising as well as a long term vision that centers Black lives.

Sincerely,

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