

August 3, 2020
NW20-016

TO: NW Council
FROM: NW Council's Legislative & Public Affairs Committee

SUBJECT: **PRESUBMITTED NEW BUSINESS: Condemn Police Violence and Systemic Racism**

Background

The recent killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis Police shocked the nation and brought the serious issues of police brutality and systemic racism to the forefront of the national conversation. Locally, this has brought a renewed focus on the killings and abuses committed by law enforcement in the Puget Sound region.

Why?

A disturbing history of excessive force and racial profiling: While we may like to think that things are different here in the Pacific Northwest, local law enforcement has a history of excessive force and racial profiling. A spate of excessive force incidents committed by Seattle Police between 2009 and 2010, including the high-profile shooting death of John T. Williams, a Native American woodcarver, resulted in a U.S. Department of Justice investigation of Seattle Police Department (SPD) that found, "a pattern or practice of constitutional violations regarding the use of force that result from structural problems, as well as serious concerns about biased policing." SPD and the Department of Justice (DOJ) subsequently entered a consent decree requiring SPD to implement reforms. Despite this, SPD officers shot and killed Charleena Lyles, a mentally ill Black woman, in 2017 when responding to a burglary she herself called. Elsewhere in the region, King County sheriff's deputies shot and killed Tommy Le, who was suspected of having a knife (later found to be a pen), and Tacoma police restrained Manuel Ellis in a way that caused him to suffocate to death. A 2019 SPD report showed that while incidents involving force have become rarer, racial disparities remain. Black men are on the receiving end of 32% of use-of-force incidents, despite African Americans making up only 7% of Seattle's population. People of color are overall more likely to be searched by SPD, despite being less likely to have weapons found on them in those searches than white people. People of color are also more likely to have guns pointed at them by SPD officers.

Police are rarely held accountable for their abuses: The four Minneapolis police officers responsible for murdering George Floyd were not arrested and charged until after several days of protests in Minneapolis and around the country. The Louisville police officers who murdered Breonna Taylor in her sleep after breaking into her apartment are still at large. The police officer who killed Rayshard Brooks with two shots to his back as he ran from being handcuffed for being drunk and sleeping in his car in a Wendy's drive-thru. Seattle Police officer Adley Shepherd was fired for punching a handcuffed woman already in the back of a patrol car, but then reinstated by the Disciplinary Review Board (DRB) - only to be later overturned by a judge in an exceptional case. Too often, police officers who brutalize and kill our fellow citizens are never held accountable.

Obstruction of Accountability and Reforms: In 2017, the Seattle City Council passed a landmark police accountability law, which expanded civilian oversight over SPD. Just a year later, the council ratified a new collective bargaining agreement with the Seattle Police Officer's Guild was opposed by the Community Police Commission, 24 community groups, and the Seattle King County NAACP, on the grounds that it undermined provisions of the accountability law. Earlier this year, Seattle Police Officer's Guild elected Mike Solan as their union President in a landslide; a hard-liner known for leading statewide opposition to 2018's Initiative 940 on accountability for police use of deadly force. This shows that Seattle Police Officer's Guild, from the rank-and-file to the very top, is uninterested in, and actively opposed to common-sense policing reforms.

Systemic racism hurts our union brothers and sisters: In the days following the murder of George Floyd, African-American Boeing employees, both unionized and not, shared their grief on inSite, an internal company

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message board. They spoke of fearing for their lives during traffic stops, giving their children "the talk" about how to interact with police, and even being personally assaulted by police officers. It is unacceptable that our coworkers and fellow union members are disproportionately subjected to these injustices.

Recent Developments: In response to protests starting in late May, Seattle Police have shown a propensity to escalate violence against peaceful demonstrators. On Monday June 1st, tear gas and flash-bang grenades were used indiscriminately against a crowd of protestors in the densely populated Capitol Hill neighborhood, risking the health and safety of protesters and residents of nearby homes. The use of crowd control weapons that attack the respiratory system in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic is not only irresponsible, but sadistic. Seattle police also used pepper spray on a 9 year-old child at a protest downtown the prior weekend, and refused to disclose the badge number of the officer. A 21-year old protester was hit directly in the chest by a stun grenade, with first responders resuscitating them multiple times. The list continues. Abuses like these elicited over 14,000 complaints to the Office of Police Accountability within the first days of the protest.

Additional Information

Police respond to protests against police violence with even more police violence: Widely released footage from recent nationwide protests in response to police violence and systemic racism show heavily militarized police forces suppressing peaceful protesters of all races using wildly disproportionate levels of force, including the indiscriminate use of tear gas. There have also been recordings of police committing atrocities such as ramming protesters with their vehicles, assaulting journalists and news crews, firing rubber bullets directly into the faces of protesters resulting in partial blindness for some, and even using the same knee-on-neck move that was used to murder George Floyd. These protesters are our neighbors, friends, and coworkers, and any level of police violence against them is unacceptable.

Black workers have the highest rates of union membership of any race: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Black workers have the highest rates of union membership of any race. They are also among the most likely to be victims of police violence. By speaking out against police brutality, the Northwest Council can stand in solidarity with our Black union brothers and sisters.

Banned by the Geneva Convention: Police departments around the nation have used tear gas indiscriminately on peacefully protesting citizens despite its use in warfare being banned by the Geneva Convention. If we have agreed not to subject enemy combatants to this chemical weapon, why is it acceptable to use it against our own citizens exercising their First Amendment rights?

Other Endorsements of Action against Police Violence: Washington State Labor Council, American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) 8, Professional and Technical Employees Local 17 (PROTEC17), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 925, Teamsters 117, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) 21, Washington Federation of State Employees, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 28, Washington State Nurses Association, Amalgamated Transit Union, American Federation of Government Employees, American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), International Longshore and Warehouse Union, International Longshoremen's Association, National Nurses United, North America's Building Trades Unions, Office and Professional Employees International Union, Pride at Work, Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Teamsters, Teamsters National Black Caucus, Transport Workers Union

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Motion

It is moved that: **THE NORTHWEST COUNCIL PUBLICLY CONDEMNS THOSE POLICE DEPARTMENTS AND OFFICERS AROUND THE NORTHWEST THAT ENGAGE IN ABUSES, UNNECESSARY VIOLENCE, SYSTEMIC RACISM, AND OBSTRUCTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY. ADDITIONALLY, THE NW COUNCIL DEMANDS SWIFT JUSTICE FOR ALL VICTIMS OF POLICE BRUTALITY.**

Pro: Approval of this motion will allow our labor delegates to support improving police interaction at their Labor Councils.

Con: Conservative NW Members support aggressive police responses to the protests and would prefer NW Council not take a position.

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