



**American Friends
Service Committee**

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July 17, 2020

The Honorable Rep. Aaron Michlewitz Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means

The Honorable Rep. Claire D. Cronin Chair, Joint Committee on the Judiciary

Re: Testimony in Support of Police Accountability -- Use of Force Standards, Qualified Immunity Reform, and Prohibitions on Face Surveillance

Dear Chairs Michlewitz and Cronin,

On behalf of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a 1947 Nobel Peace Laurette, I write in strong support of the many provisions in S.2820 designed to increase police accountability. In particular, our organization urges you to:

- 1) Adopt strict limits on police use of force,
- 2) End qualified immunity, because it shields police from accountability and denies victims of police violence their day in court, and
- 3) Prohibit government use of face surveillance technology, which threatens core civil liberties and racial justice.

This historic moment, made clear by the public assassination of George Floyd, is not about one police killing or about one police department. Massachusetts is not immune. Bill Barr's Department of Justice, no friend of Black Lives Matter, recently reported that a unit of the Springfield Police Department *routinely* uses brutal, excessive violence against residents of that city. We must address police violence and abuses as historic, structural, and systemic to the functioning of law enforcement institutions in the United States.

The AFSC has for a century worked for the human rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized peoples in society including the incarcerated and immigrant detainees, and ending institutional violence perpetrated by the apparatus of the state.

Of critical and urgent importance: Massachusetts must abolish the dangerous doctrine of qualified immunity because it shields police from being held accountable to their victims. Limits on use of force are meaningless unless they are enforceable. Yet today, qualified immunity protects police even when they blatantly and seriously violate people's civil rights, including by excessive use of force resulting in permanent injury or even death. It denies victims of police

violence their day in court. Ending or reforming qualified immunity is the most important police accountability measure in S2820. Maintaining Qualified Immunity ensures that Black Lives Don't Matter. We urge you to end immunity in order to end impunity.

Finally, we urge the House to prevent the expansion of police powers and budgets by prohibiting government entities, including police, from using face surveillance technologies. Specifically, we ask that you include H.1538 in your omnibus bill. Face surveillance technologies have serious racial bias flaws built into their systems. There are increasing numbers of cases in which Black people are wrongfully arrested due to errors with these technologies (as well as sloppy police work). We should not allow police in Massachusetts to use technology that supercharges racial bias and expands police powers to surveil everyone, every day and everywhere we go.

On a personal note, I grew up in the South Bronx. *On a number of occasions* as a teenager I have been brutalized by police officers for being a young brown male. It just may be luck that I have survived those horrific experiences that is *common for people of color on a daily basis*.

This legislation S.2820 must be passed without delay and signed into law this session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Gabriel Canales".