



TO THE AFL-CIO:

We are a group of civil rights organizations, elected officials, faith leaders, academics, public defenders, and community-based organizers who believe in the power of unions, and who recognize the history that unions have given power to people in our communities who are often powerless. However, that proud history is being destroyed by the legacy that police unions are leaving behind, and we ask you to stop allowing the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA) and other law enforcement affiliates including prison guard unions to use the protections the AFL-CIO provides under your power and leadership.

We ask you to disassociate the IUPA from the AFL-CIO.

We further ask that all other AFL-CIO unions establish a policy to not include police or other law enforcement, including immigration-related officers, in their membership.

For too long, police unions have used the contract negotiation process to enact measures that shield police from accountability at the expense of public safety, to grow their budget for their self-interest rather than the interest of the community, and to impede necessary change by attacking progressives—including the broader labor movement—who have been at the forefront of criminal justice reform.

The killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Tony McDade are just the latest signs of the all-too-apparent crisis in policing in America. But it would be a continued mistake to question the structure of policing—as we are now—but then to say that the profession as it exists now may be reformed. We've made that mistake before. We can no longer tinker around the edges of this issue.

Eric Garner. Michael Brown. Laquan McDonald. Sandra Bland. Jessica Williams. These police killings six years ago sparked protests across the country and birthed the Black Lives Matter movement and a flood of reform efforts. Six years later, though, we see that nothing has changed.

The solutions we need right now both to protect our safety and to rescue our democracy are ones that meet the scale of the problem. To respond to George Floyd's death, or Breonna Taylor's death, we must replace the questions about how to reform policing with questions about what a broader vision for safety and justice in America should look like and what role policing should play in it. However, as long as police unions can hide behind the shield that the AFL-CIO provides, no real action can be taken that will move our country forward.

In the past few years, we have seen a wave of criminal justice reforms sweeping the country. There is a growing recognition that mass incarceration hurts the powerless the most—whether it's holding someone in jail because they can't afford to pay their bail, demanding a high fine or fee to pay for a diversion program, or violating someone on probation because they missed an appointment due to childcare. And this growing recognition includes Richard Trumka, the president of AFL-CIO, who acknowledged during a speech on criminal justice reform that this nation, under the guise of public

safety, spends billions making our country less safe by selectively locking people up and sealing people out and shut entire communities down by creating a permanent criminal class. He also committed: "I made a promise to myself that I would do everything in my power to help change this tragic reality."

But as advocates in cities and counties across the country -- including your leader -- have fought to equalize the playing field, the one voice that obstructed reform -- through vicious attacks and fear mongering tactics -- has been the police unions. The AFL-CIO cannot stand for criminal justice reform, while at the same time allowing police unions to use your power to impede reform. In contract negotiations across the country, unions have fought again and again to prevent accountability measures from being put in place such as civilian review boards and making discipline records transparent. The unions impede this needed reform by claiming that accountability will interfere with policing, and making the false claim that somehow accountability is at odds with public safety when, in fact, the opposite is true. Derek Chauvin, the officer charged with murdering George Floyd, had 18 prior complaints filed with Minneapolis Police Department's Internal Affairs, while his accomplice Tou Thao was the subject of six complaints. It was union protection that allowed them to remain armed, dangerous, and a threat to public safety. The AFL-CIO should not be complicit in shielding their members from accountability. These unions dishonor the labor movement.

Police unions have a long history of maintaining their power by exploiting fears and promoting the myth that more police equals less crime. This is the rhetoric used to push back from budget cuts that could mean more money to spend on housing, education, mental health treatment, or other services that can make communities safer while improving life outcomes for all. This is funding that is either taken from, or not available to, other union members who work for the government.

Across the country, people are working to change the landscape of law enforcement by common sense reforms that increase public safety such as sending experts in mental health and substance abuse to treat people instead of police and using community based violence interrupters to prevent gun violence. However, when the police union uses the AFL-CIO to stand in the way of reform by unnecessarily advocating for increased police spending, we all lose.

We respect the need for unions to protect people's rights in the workplace, but we also agree with President Trumka that criminal justice reform is a labor issue. If AFL-CIO wants to prove its commitment to racial justice, worker solidarity, and meaningful reform, then AFL-CIO must permanently disaffiliate from the IUPA and sever its ties with any and all other police associations. It must also ask all unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO to establish a policy preventing police officers from joining other affiliate unions.

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