

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Karen Bass  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2021 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-0537

Dear Congresswoman Bass:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the NEA across the nation who are dedicated to teaching, supporting, and nurturing all students regardless of their race or ethnicity, we urge you to vote YES on the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021 (H.R. 1280) and work to continue to improve the legislation. Votes associated with this issue may be included in NEA's Report Card for the 117th Congress.

Educators believe that preparing students for the responsibilities of citizenship means teaching them to appreciate a fundamental principle of our democracy: Under our nation's system of laws, all of us are equal and deserving of protections. However, the recent police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and Daniel Prude make a mockery of that principle, and have brought to the fore systemic, deeply rooted racism. In many communities of color, residents are not treated or policed according to the principle of equality under the law. They are not first viewed as citizens, but as suspects.

Our Black and brown students see this dissonance—in fact, many experience it before they are even old enough to articulate it. They grow up in households where they are taught to tread carefully at all times, watch what they say and do, and rein in their exuberance to avoid undue attention from law enforcement. But many heartbreaking examples reinforce the reality that no matter what our students do, their safety is not assured. They are too often presumed guilty until proven innocent, and even innocence will not guarantee their survival.

Going to school or returning home from an after-school job or visiting friends or going to a cookout or concert—or a playground—should not put students' lives at risk. But sadly, in communities of color, this is the reality. In fact, a 2019 study published in a National Academy of Sciences journal found that about 1 in every 1,000 Black men can expect to be killed by police.

The House of Representatives must lead the effort to end police brutality and promote policies that dismantle institutionalized racism in law enforcement. We recognize that some in law enforcement have taken steps to adjust practices and training programs, but much more is needed. NEA members believe that without federal reform, police brutality will continue with impunity and the spotlight will fade, especially given fast-changing news cycle. The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act takes initial steps to end police brutality, protect the civil rights and liberties of all people, and restore the faith that we want—and need—to place in law enforcement agencies. These steps include:

- Prohibiting law enforcement agencies from profiling based on race, religion, or other characteristics, and mandating training on discriminatory profiling for all law enforcement;
- Banning chokeholds and other maneuvers that apply pressure that slows or stops the flow of blood to the brain;

- Banning no-knock warrants and limiting the transfer of military-grade equipment to state and local law enforcement (we also support expanding this provision to prohibit the transfer of military-grade equipment to schools);
- Mandating the use of dashboard and body cameras for federal law enforcement, and requiring state and local law enforcement to use federal funds to purchase police body cameras; and
- Calling on the Department of Justice to reinstate its role in investigating instances of police brutality and to establish independent all-civilian review boards to investigate these incidents.

While we support the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, we cannot support in its current form the provision on qualified immunity. The provision is overly expansive and fails to address broader accountability reforms that would be more effective in tackling issues of systemic racism and institutional bias within law enforcement and police officers' interactions with communities of color.

NEA members are active in the fight for social and racial justice because it is directly linked to ensuring that all students, in every community, have access to the learning opportunities they deserve. But these opportunities are only accessible to the extent that we can keep students in Black and brown communities safe from police brutality and excessive use of force.

Protesters from coast to coast and even across the globe are pushing America to live up to our ideals and keep our promises; in fact, a recent study by [Civis Analytics reported](#) that the huge outpouring for Black lives may be the largest social justice movement ever in our nation. We are at an inflection point; we must not risk the possibility that another Black family will be left to mourn a loved one's senseless death at the hands of those we are supposed to trust. We urge you to join this movement for equal justice by voting YES on the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, and we look forward to working with members of Congress in both chambers to improve the legislation and enact meaningful reforms.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association