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Black Parents Workshop Responds to Police Use of Force Data Group Calls for Moratorium on Officers in School Buildings

(Maplewood, NJ) – The Black Parents Workshop, Inc. has sent a letter to State Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal offering recommendations in response to data on police use of force reported in a series published by NJ Advance Media. The letter follows up two prior communications with the Office of Attorney General dating back to August 2017 when the Black Parents Workshop encouraged the office to assume oversight of the Maplewood police department due to the assault upon Black youth by township police after the township’s July 5, 2016 Independence Day fireworks event.

The police use of force reveal that the Maplewood and South Orange police have used force disproportionately against Black civilians as compared to whites. The disparity is alarming and gross. The data suggests both communities are environments that pose a considerable threat to Black civilians who encounter local police.

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Black Parents Workshop Chairman Walter Fields said, “The data on police use of force that was compiled by the excellent reporting of journalists with NJ Advance Media paints a very disturbing picture of the vulnerability of Black civilians during encounters with local police. It also validates the concerns we raised with the state Attorney General earlier this year over the racial profiling of Black students in the South Orange-Maplewood School District through the disciplinary process.”

The Black Parents Workshop has cautioned the school district over the manner in which Black students have been targeted for body and property searches upon the accusation of being under the influence of a banned substance. We have identified instances in which school building administrators have used the threat of calling the police to coerce students to submit to a search and students interrogated and searched without the knowledge or consent of parents. We have also represented parents who have reached out to us over concerns of the targeting of their students. These practices contribute to the criminalization of Black students and their feeding into the school-to-prison pipeline. At the heart of this concern is the manner in which police are used to intimidate students in an educational setting.

Fields said, “We have a history of a much-publicized incident in Columbia High School when a Black student was body slammed by a police officer in the school cafeteria. The preponderance of aggressive policing of Black civilians warrants an immediate moratorium on the placement of uniformed and armed police officers in public school buildings. The Attorney General should direct all school districts to examine the data on police use of force and immediately remove from school buildings any officer found on the list.”

The Black Parents Workshop has provided the Attorney General with a list of 13 recommendations in response to the data on police use of force. The recommendations include:

1. The Attorney General should direct all school districts to examine the data on police use of force and immediately remove from school buildings any officer found on the list

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2. The re-establishment of the Task Force on the Use of Force created by Attorney General Robert Del Tufo under the administration of Governor Jim Florio
3. Creation of a Use of Force Hotline in the Office of the Attorney General for citizen complaints
4. Electronic reporting of citizen complaints
5. A moratorium on the placement of uniformed and armed police officers in public schools as School Resource Officers
6. Requiring officers to provide a sworn, written statement no less than 6 hours after being involved in an incident in which force was used to subdue or apprehend a civilian. Force being defined as physical restraint or contact or the use of an instrument (e.g. baton, firearm, stun gun) to overpower a civilian.
7. A review of all arrests of individuals by officers cited as those who have repeatedly used force according to the reporting of NJ Advance Media
8. A review of all officers cited as those who have repeatedly used force according to the reporting of NJ Advance Media
9. Mandatory drug testing of all officers that use force during interactions with civilians within 6 hours of the incident
10. Random drug testing of all police officers
11. Mandatory quarterly public reporting by local police departments of all incidents of use of force by officer and race/gender of civilian
12. Expedited review of citizen complaints against local police officers
13. Increased protections for officers who report incidents of excessive force by fellow officers

These recommendations extend far beyond the predictive suggestions of hiring Black and Latino officers and the creation of citizens review committees. Neither of those responses have proven effective to reduce patterns of use of force by police. While we encourage and support increasing the diversity of uniformed officers in departments, we are clear that changing the complexion of officers does not necessarily result in a change of practices that discriminate against Blacks and Latinos.

The Black Parents Workshop also calls upon the South Orange-Maplewood School District to suspend the placement of police in ALL schools in the district and to review all instances in which police have been called into schools by school building personnel.

“Black parents should be assured that their children will not be exposed to officers with a predilection for violent behavior or unfairly put in the position of having to encounter a police

officer in a school building through the disciplinary process,” said Walter Fields. The Black Parents Workshop will make its position known to the administration and Board of the South Orange-Maplewood School District.

Attachments

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