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Justice2Jobs Letter to the Sacramento City Council and Board of Supervisors

Sacramento Elected Officials: Now is the Time to Reduce Law Enforcement Spending and Reinvest in Community

The murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police Department set off protests in at least 75 other U.S. cities--each city haunted by its own failures to address systemic racism. Dr. King noted that the moral arc of the universe “bends toward justice” in 1968. Yet today, Sacramento city’s and county’s continuation of 170 years of racialized policymaking maintains a series of second-class opportunities for Black children and families--deep and persistent wealth, health, and education inequality, over-policing and mass incarceration. Meanwhile, our police and sheriff obtain unprecedented levels of city and county power, electoral and policy influence, and funding to maintain “public safety” at the expense of Black bodies and neighborhoods, and most recently.

Our annual city’s and county’s budgets, often regarded as a moral statement of priorities, reveal that over two-thirds of Sacramento tax dollars are used in part to over-police and criminalize low-income and communities of color.

We are rooted in 170 years of racialized budget- and policy-making that reproduces each year a budget for haves and have nots, with systemic racism at its core and law enforcement as a key enforcer of these policies. The city’s and county’s advancement of large-scale racialized policies include:

- Denying Black people (including Chinese and Native Americans) the right to testify in cases involving white people (1850s),
- Residential segregation,
- Redlining (1930s),
- Redevelopment (1950s),
- The “War on Drugs” (1970s and 1980’s),
- Over-policed and militarized neighborhoods,
- Discontinued inclusionary housing policies,
- “Legalized” killing of Stephon Clark (2018),
- Mays v. Sacramento County consent decree (2019),
- Continued regressive taxation,
- Ongoing racialized voting patterns observed on the city’s Measure G campaign to increase funding for youth of color (2020).

As our community grieves with understandable desperation to #sayhisname, the largely peaceful protests are met with a militarized response. The police and sheriff’s rain of

rubber bullets on protestors, medics, legal observers, and children is all the more horrific because it is funded and approved by the city's and county's dollars that have been stripped from our communities.

Sacramento police and sheriff are quick to embrace adherence to procedural justice reforms, anti-bias training, community policing, and a technology-focused 21st Century Policing model, much like Minneapolis's Police Department. Despite these high-cost reforms and organizational pivots, George Floyd, Stephon Clark, Joseph Mann, and Marshall Miles have been taken from us too soon.

Excessive funding to law enforcement robs our community of opportunity. More policing does not equate to lowering crime. We must break the racialized budget and policy cycles of oppression—stop, search, arrest, repeat. And re-imagine a healthy and powerful public safety cycle that advances early childhood education, trauma-informed care, effective reentry programs and affordable housing.

COVID-19 is unleashing unparalleled layers of further health and financial inequality which will only worsen the quality of life for Black children and families. Even during “better” economic times with unemployment rates at 5% or 6% in the last few years, Black children die at over 2 times the rate of other children. Young Black men are 5.5 times more likely to be stopped and searched while driving, making this not just a “Ferguson problem.” Today, roughly 27% of Black people, post-Great Recession, own their own home compared to 62% of white people. Now imagine the impending 20% unemployment rate of the Sacramento region that will devastate Black families and communities.

Reconciliation and reinvestment to counter the scale of 170 years of generational disinvestment and overcriminalization, and even mitigate the negative health and financial impacts of COVID-19, can be realized. It must be realized for our Black community.

Our community offers the following recommendations:

- Call a joint emergency meeting of both the city council and county board of supervisors to address law enforcements' current response (or lack thereof) to the George Floyd protests and concrete steps to reduce law enforcements' budgets for FY 2020-21.
- Reduce spending on police and sheriff by 30% for fiscal year 2020-21 and develop funding reduction strategies for the following 4 years. Current budgeted programs included in law enforcements' budgets should continue to be implemented within their budget dollars.
- Re-invest all cost savings in alternatives to police that do not kill Black people disproportionately. Examples: Sacramento's MH First (alternative first responder), Advance Peace (community violence interrupter), HAWK Institute (youth mentoring and education) and high-impact youth, employment, expungement, domestic violence, addiction and mental health treatment community services. Direct the city's and county's legislative office to write a

letter of support for AB 2054, which would increase funding to community organizations to provide emergency response services.

- Develop and implement a racial equity framework to ensure all city and county policies and budgets address racial equity gaps. Consider: What is the social and financial cost of deferring racial equity and justice in our region?
- Spend no funding from the CARES federal stimulus funds on any law enforcement function;
- Refuse political contributions from law enforcement unions;
- Reduce the jail population and stop investing in the new Sac County jail. Fund a community-led “alternatives to policing” and “alternatives to incarceration” plan; report on all criminal justice system pipelines in real-time (daily arrests, daily jail population, number in diversion programs, number of inmates released, number of recidivists, etc.); and use the “alternatives to policing” and “alternatives to incarceration” plan to inform any spending on the local justice system;
- Join together to elect a new District Attorney and Sheriff who are committed to racial justice, to ending mass incarceration and to stopping the killing of Black People; and
- Be accountable to, and transparent with, Black communities. Explain what city and county leaders are doing to sustainably reduce those gaps with firm budget commitments.

We know there is an unprecedented national effort to find a cure for COVID-19 measured in months, possibly years. How long do we wait to cure the endless loop of racialized policymaking and its destructive effects in Sacramento?

We need reconciliation, reinvestment, and visionary leadership that creates transformational budgets and policy outcomes to save Black lives. Now is the time for action.

Sincerely,

The following concerned members of the Sacramento community