

Executive Director
Jeremy Burton

July 17, 2020

President
Stacey Bloom

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

**First
Vice President**
Scott Gilefsky

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

Secretary
Samantha Joseph

Dear Chairs Michlewitz and Cronin,

Treasurer
Frank Litwin

On behalf of the Jewish Community Relations Council, I write to thank you for your commitment to taking up legislation to promote racial justice and secure meaningful police reform and accountability. We are grateful that each of you are helping to shape this monumental and needed bill, as our communities need healing.

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We would like to lift up a few of the provisions in S.2820 necessary to increase police accountability. We urge 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.

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The Jewish Community Relations Council has a long history of speaking out in support of policies that promote racial justice and work to dismantle systemic racism. At this moment in history, our partners in the Black community and people of color in our own community are united in their call to finally address police violence. As Jews, we say that antisemitism is not a Jewish problem, but rather a failure on the part of the greater society; that too rings true about racism. It is our obligation to speak up, speak out and follow the lead of the Black community to end this scourge.

*voting member

George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets all around the country to demand fundamental changes to policing and concrete steps to address systemic racism. This historic moment is not about one police killing or about one police department. Massachusetts is not immune. Indeed, Bill Barr's Department of Justice 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, stop the disparate policing of and brutality against communities of color and Black people in particular, and hold police accountable for civil rights violations. These changes are essential for the health and safety of our communities here in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts must establish strong standards limiting excessive force by police. When police interact with civilians, they should only use force when it is absolutely necessary, after

JCRC engages the Jewish community in public life and builds solidarity across the broader community to meet the critical challenges of our times.



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attempting to de-escalate, when all other options have been exhausted. Police must use force that is proportional to the situation, and the minimum amount required to accomplish a lawful purpose. And several tactics commonly associated with death or serious injury, including the use of chokeholds, tear gas, rubber bullets, and no-knock warrants should be outlawed entirely.

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.

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. 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.

There is broad consensus that we must act swiftly and boldly to address police violence, strengthen accountability, and advance racial justice. We urge you to pass the strongest possible legislation without delay, and to ensure that it is signed into law this session.

Sincerely,

Aaron Agulnek

Director of Government Affairs
Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston

