



# NAACP

## *Brooklyn Branch*

### **TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CODES REGARDING REPEAL OF SECTION 50-A OF THE NEW YORK STATE CIVIL RIGHTS LAW**

**Thursday, October 24, 2019**

Good afternoon Chairman Bailey and members of the committee. My name is L. Joy Williams and I am President of Brooklyn NAACP and the Legislative Coordinator for the New York State Conference of Branches which represents over 50 branches and thousands of members across the state of New York. Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to testify before you today on what we believe to be a very important issue in our ongoing fight for equity, fairness and justice in this country.

As you know, the mission of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is to ensure the political educational, social and economic equality of rights in order to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons. To that end, the NAACP supports an increase in trust and public safety by advancing effective law enforcement practices which include strong measures of police oversight and accountability. The NAACP New York State Conference of Branches strongly support the repeal of section 50-A of the New York State Civil Rights Law and urge the New York State Legislature to take on this matter in the 2020 legislative session.

Comprehensive change is required to create the climate of trust that is needed for the community and police officers to be safe. The NAACP's police reform agenda focuses on three key areas of reform that have the potential to make this fundamental change. Our communities need police forces that are held accountable for misconduct, that have strong policies and relevant training, and in which the community plays an active role. We believe the repeal of section 50-a is crucial in holding law enforcement accountable. It would empower communities with information about any

and all available misconduct and disciplinary information about the officers who are tasked with keeping them safe.

We cede an immense amount of power to police officers. They have the power to make arrests, use measures of force, up to and including the use of deadly force. Most who have been granted that power understand that it is not given without also accepting the immense responsibility that power holds. The NAACP recognizes that every day, law enforcement officers face danger, sometimes life threatening, while carrying out their responsibilities. However, if and when one of their colleagues engages in biased behavior and that behavior goes unchecked, it results in the further deterioration of police and community relations and a lack of trust in the system overall.

We have a right to know of any misconduct and disciplinary information about the police officers who patrol the streets of our neighborhoods and our government should not continue to be complicit in shielding this information from the public. Just as we have access to the misconduct and disciplinary information of teachers, lawyers, nurses and doctors, law enforcement (who are public servants with salaries and benefits paid by our tax dollars) should not be exempt. We deserve to know if there are any police officers in our community who have unjustly killed someone, sexually assaulted someone, lied in their official capacity in court or has repeatedly been disciplined for the use of excessive force.

In addition to ensuring officers who are repeat bad actors or who unjustly kill civilians are successfully prosecuted, reforms need to hold officers and police departments accountable for their misconduct short of using deadly force. These reforms include intervening early for problem officers and increasing the oversight provided by licensing police officers. When used consistently, early intervention can identify officers who are exhibiting problem behavior and allow supervisors to intervene before there are instances of serious misconduct.

Police misconduct, the lack of law enforcement accountability to the communities they serve and the seemingly unwillingness for those with the power of oversight to pursue and enact policy and laws to address these issues, sends a message to New Yorkers that our demands, our rights and our lives are not respected or valued.

We want our communities to be safe from those individuals who commit acts of violence, theft and abuse but we also want our communities to be shielded from individual officers who have unknown acts of misconduct and abuse.