

MILLIONHOODIES

MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE

Statement by the Million Hoodies Movement for Justice Before the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

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Million Hoodies is a national racial justice organization founded to protect and empower young people of color from mass criminalization and gun violence. In 2012, our organization created a tool to help track and document incidents of police misconduct and institutional discrimination and has since collected over 2,000 incidents of misconduct in New York City alone.

In 2010, a SWAT officer shot Aiyana Stanley-Jones, 7, to death during a late night raid in Detroit after a grenade lit her blanket on fire. A SWAT team raided the mayor of a small town in Prince George's County, Maryland in 2008 after he and his wife were held at gunpoint for drug allegations. Militarized police in the U.S. are trampling over our civil rights and turning Black and Brown communities into war zones.

The militarization of police in the U.S. would not be possible without programs from the Defense Department and Department of Homeland Security, providing federal surplus of military equipment to local and college campus police departments. An ACLU report found no outside oversight or reporting on the use of SWAT tactics and police militarization while over 120 campus police forces have received military equipment from the Pentagon through the National Defense Authorization Act. When students at the University of California, Riverside, a Million Hoodies chapter, publicly demanded the scaling back of university privatization, police met them with batons and paintball pellets. In 2011, campus police used CS gas, pepper pellets, and beanbag rounds on Occupy protestors at UC-Davis. Inspired by this growing movement, Million Hoodies believes that the political and cultural stage is set to push for more effective and inclusive policing practices.

Recommendations:

With the emergence of new technologies like the "use of force simulators"¹ it is important to be aware of some of the opportunities and potential pitfalls of relying solely upon technology to change police behavior. No one approach can

¹ <http://www.titraining.com/>

impact the issues we are currently facing with regards to police-community interactions. Therefore, it is very important that we take a holistic approach to the issue of excessive force when dealing with police training and protocol. In order to effectively address issues of police misconduct we must acknowledge the multiple factors that contribute to this phenomenon and try to comprehensively address each.

Education is a two-way street²

In dealing with cases of excessive force and police misconduct we must first and foremost educate the citizenry about what is expected of them. Citizens, especially the youth, should have the opportunity to **learn about their rights in an easily accessible format**. Preparing the youth to properly engage with law enforcement at an early age increases the likelihood that they will **avoid unnecessary confrontations with police officers**. Furthermore, preparing the youth how to engage with officers in a school setting **allows for dialogue to take place among peers and between experts or professionals**.³ Cultivating this type of education among the citizenry can have positive impacts for future generations by teaching people how to properly interact with law enforcement. Unfortunately, many of the excessive force/violation of personal rights incidents occur because citizens are viewed as **potential threats**. If we can be proactive in educating citizens how to properly engage and communicate with law enforcement officials, we may have a better chance of reducing the amount of deaths of unarmed citizens.

Formal Education

Police officers could be required to take preliminary or refresher courses on subjects such as conflict negotiation and mediation. Since officers are often placed in very challenging and complex situations it is important that they are able to **effectively communicate to citizens under duress**. This formal education should also focus on the psychological effects of historic police-community interactions. For instance, in locations where there has been a history of police misconduct, racial tensions or excessive force there should be some accompanying **education about the historical relationship between law enforcement and residents in that neighborhood, precinct or city**. Having police officers be aware of the historical trauma of a community can help better contextualize officers' work in certain communities. This type of training is especially important when police departments patrolling communities of color are not representative of the racial composition of the neighborhood. If officers remain unaware or neglectful of this history they are putting themselves and the community at a major disadvantage. Understanding the history and significance of places and incidents that took place in the neighborhood in previous years is especially important in low-income communities where there

² <http://strategiesforyouth.org/>

³ ACLU

may be generations of residents living in the same neighborhood. If officers new to the area remain unaware of this history, while long-time residents carry this baggage and pass this knowledge onto new generations there will undoubtedly be a discrepancy between the expectations and actions on both sides. Whether warranted or not, there are many communities that live in fear of the police because of their personal and/or historical traumas which can lead to prejudices and biases towards the police. Therefore, one step that should be taken is to formally educate police about these incidents and provide trainings that will help officers respond to these residents in a culturally relevant manner. Providing diversity training for police officers that include **community charrettes** with residents in the local community can offer some insights into these complex police-community dynamics at play. It is important that both sides of the story be heard and that residents and police recognize that only by working together and being respectful of one another will relations improve. Diversity training should deal with the cultural, social and psychological impacts of crime and heavy policing in low-income communities and communities of color. **Helping police understand how to deescalate situations in a ways that do not require excessive force** is extremely important in advancing these relationships in a positive direction. If police continue to respond to incidents with excessive force it will only further alienate the community and diminish the likelihood that police-community relations will ever improve. Therefore,

Tasks and Action Items

- Create working groups within community organizations and at schools that allow for best practices to be shared among students.
- Provide teens with the space to share stories of personal experiences and trauma with police. This can help deal with stress and biases from traumatic incidents and hopefully dispel some prejudices that *all* police officers act in this way.
- These group meetings (whether held by the school or a community organization) can invite officers into a safe space where students, teachers and mediators can share stories and best practices.
- If there is buy-in from police officers there may be an opportunity to present what they view as misconduct, threatening or disrespectful. These types of interactions could hopefully help cultivate a better understanding from both parties' perspectives and create dialogue that can improve the local community.
- If students are allowed to share their stories of personal harassment with law enforcement officials present it may help educate officers about they are viewed within the community. This could potentially help bridge the gap between the two parties and offer some potential solutions for future encounters for both

parties.

Data Acquisition and Usage

In the era of big data there is great potential to implement monitoring/tracking software that reveal to use the opportunities and potential liabilities for policing. By monitoring incidents such as the killings of unarmed citizens we can learn a great deal about the type of policing that is taking place in certain neighborhoods. Although this information may be sensitive it could be very valuable to put together an application that does something similar to the LA Times Homicide Report.⁴ This report documents all of the killings within LA County and breaks it down by year, gender, race, etc.. If police departments across the nation were **required to report the killings of unarmed victims by their officers** it could help put this epidemic into perspective. If basic data is required to be provided such as race, gender, age and location of death this could help us decipher some key trends about these types of killings. It is important to note that this data may not do justice to every single case because there are often extenuating circumstances in these instances. However, gathering this basic information (excluding name and other sensitive information) could help determine if there are precincts or cities that are experiencing a higher cluster or rate of these types of incidents. Gathering this data and making it publicly available would not only increase transparency but could help identify potential problem areas within police departments and cities.

With the recent turn toward “use of force” simulators in police academies there is a great opportunity for police officers to undergo periodic trainings. If officers were required to **participate in periodic trainings they could be easily monitored on their progress** or lack thereof, which could provide essential information to help keep ill-prepared officers off the street. For instance, if a use of force simulation training was require four times of the course of one year it would be relatively easy to document and track an officer’s progress. If an officer fails 50% of these trainings over the course of two years it is very likely that the officer in question may need to be retrained. This type of periodic assessment could help keep officers who are ill-prepared off the streets and ensure that all patrolling officers are up to date with the most recent training and techniques taught in the use of force simulations. These assessments could greatly reduce the risk of officers being caught of guard and can constantly prepare them for unfavorable situations.

Data should also be used to monitor police misconduct and potential liabilities within police departments. For instance, if a police officer has multiple cases or complaints against him regarding the use of excessive force it is of the utmost importance that this be monitored by superiors. Unfortunately, because of improper data handling there are some officers who remain in positions of power

⁴ <http://homicide.latimes.com/>

despite their repeated offenses.⁵ It could be required that any incidents of police misconduct or excessive force be monitored by each police precinct. If one officer surpasses a certain number of complaints or has open cases against him/her in litigation it is important that all superiors be made aware. Collecting and organizing this data in a way that is accessible to superiors and organizations like the DOJ can help monitor these officers and ensure that they do not continue to increase in their number of reported incidents. For instance, if an officer surpasses a certain number of incidents it could be mandated that he/she take a necessary leave of absence or be reassigned to a different task until he/she undergoes mandatory retraining.

Tasks and Action Items

- Require data to be collected on incidents of killings of unarmed victims. This data should have some basic data fields such as race, gender and age to determine if certain populations are experiencing these incidents at a higher rate than others.
- This type of data could be used as tool for monitoring police killings and finding trends or clusters of activity that could reveal more information about the affected population or the precinct or city serving the affected population.
- Require periodic trainings and use of force simulations to maintain a high level preparedness among officers. Use of force simulators allow for officers to determine how to react in certain situations and can provide period assessments of the tactics and techniques being used. This can ensure that both rookie cops and long-time officers have the adequate skill levels (response times, proper protocol, and cognitive development, v) to react to the situations presented in the simulator.
- Use data analytics to track if officers have pending or current excessive forces cases against them. Data should be used to monitor these incidents because it is an easy way to identify potential problem areas within a police department.
- By monitoring and tracking a police officer's record precinct's can take a more proactive approach in addressing issues of misconduct. Since some of these excessive force cases result in the department paying thousands of dollars in litigation and settlements fees it would be very beneficial for precincts be required to monitor an officer's history. Gathering evidence on an officer's history in one database could allow for a monitoring system that allows

⁵ <http://www.opposingviews.com/i/society/crime/infamously-abusive-cop-sterling-wheaten-ordered-pay-victim-250000>
<http://reason.com/blog/2013/11/22/15-internal-affairs-investigations-in-tw>

precinct's to have substantial evidence to reassign, retrain or dismiss an officer engaging in constant misconduct.