

**BEYOND THE HASHTAGS AND SLOGANS:
THE ROLE OF AAPIs IN POLICE REFORM**

AAPI
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FUND

SUMMARY

“Beyond the Hashtags and Slogans: The Role of AAPIs in Police Reform” ■ In this policy brief, civil rights attorney Je Yon Jung writes about the intersections of the Black-led movement against police brutality and the critical role that AAPIs must play in uniting for police reform. The piece explores the historical underpinnings of policing and the pathway to policing in the United States today. It demystifies the legal and practical basis for the enduring lack of police accountability in courtrooms and our society and why the movement to “defund the police” is not as radical as some believe.

BEYOND THE HASHTAGS AND SLOGANS: THE ROLE OF AAPIs IN POLICE REFORM

What does Black Lives Matter (BLM) have to do with Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs)?¹ What does “defunding the police” really mean? What stake do AAPIs have in participating in the national conversation led by Black voices and the BLM movement? In short, our lives and the possibility of a just society depend on it. Any and all steps to police reform will require multiracial participation for radical change to our criminal *and* civil justice system and its component pipelines. This is particularly true when the outcome for doing nothing is irreversible—death—and no group—especially AAPIs—can decide to sit this one out or leave it to the ones most affected to do most of the work.

Shortly after BLM became a national movement to elevate and center the exponential rates and disproportionate killing of Black lives by law enforcement, the conversation was sidetracked by oppositional media and people regarding the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” What followed has been frequently inaccurate non-Blacksplaining about what the phrase means. “All Lives Matter” became the countertrope because White people were no longer the “neutral” default, center of the universe, and starting premise from which all other non-White people were distinguished. Not surprisingly, the vitriol against “Black Lives Matter” was intended to decenter Black lives, notwithstanding overwhelming data that Black people die at the hands of police at a rate of 3.5 times more than non-Hispanic White people.

1. AAPI or Asian American and Pacific Islander is defined as encompassing people from East Asia, South Asia, the Philippines, and the Pacific Islands.

In the whirlwind of uprising and racial reckoning, the world was undergoing a global pandemic. As China was deemed ground zero for COVID-19 and former president Trump racialized the virus, violence against AAPIs increased at an unprecedented rate and the "Stop AAPI Hate" reporting site and its associated moniker gained higher profiles. Instead of connecting this violence to systems created by White supremacy, conservative detractors used "Stop AAPI Hate" and "Stop Asian Hate" as a divisive tool to mute arguments that exposed the inherent anti-Blackness of our policing systems and a justification to refocus and highlight the *necessity* of increasing those very systems. Through no fault of its originators, the "Stop AAPI Hate" campaign became an unwitting contributor to calls for ramped-up enforcement and, by extension, the uncentering of Black lives.

A limitation of designating a crime as a "hate crime" is that it potentially miscategorizes the violence as the result of personal animus or individualized hatred against the particular AAPI victim. However, this argument ignores the toxic systems of White supremacy and foundational anti-Blackness, whether that metastasis is police killing Black people or "othering" AAPIs as perpetual foreigners in this country. To be clear, violence against AAPIs or AAPIs as victims of hate crimes is not a new phenomenon, just as police killing Black people is not a new trend. But what distinguishes this period is that the (former) president of the United States publicly normalized and advocated White supremacy. The highest levels of our nation's government made it clear that the federal government would not be doing anything to interfere or suspend the enduring trajectory of violence against People of Color.

The media continues to present the false narrative that violence against Asian Americans is perpetrated predominantly by Black people, while ignoring overwhelming data that Black people are not the predominant perpetrators of hate crimes against AAPIs and that Black people are victims of hate crimes at a far greater rate than any other group.² Defocusing the attention from police violence against Black people and refocusing it instead on police as critical partners, saviors, and protectors of the AAPI community, even while police continue killing Black people with impunity, creates a gestalt perception that obstructs systemic police abuse. At the risk of placing more Black lives in the path of police, AAPIs could be misaligned against systemic and meaningful police reform. To borrow a phrase from Professor Claire Jean Kim who recently observed in a podcast entitled "Reframing Black-Asian Relations in Pandemic Times," "viewing Asian American suffering is a way to perform anti-racism on the cheap."³ AAPIs must actively reject being used as a pawn or wedge group to distract from and manipulate the systemic reform movement that is being led by BLM and other Black-led organizations. Little effort to join these historical events as parallel consequences of the systemic and institutionalized failures of our nation's White supremacist history are being made.

2. <https://www.nbcnews.com/new/asian-america/viral-images-show-people-color-anti-asian-perpetrators-misses-big-n1270821>

3. <https://edgeeffects.net/claire-jean-kim/> Claire Jean Kim on Reframing Black-Asian Relations in Pandemic Times. See also, Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," DOI: 10.1177/0032329299027001005 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0032329299027001005>

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND BLACK COMMUNITIES



Photo courtesy of Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)

Importantly, Black activists and advocates are fighting against state-sponsored murder and the ultimate abuse of badge and authority by law enforcement against Black people—the rates of which are not seen by any other group.⁴ Thus, the call to “defund the police” was a direct response to the long-standing government sponsorship that created, endorsed, and protected law enforcement killing of Black people. Calls for “defunding the police” and the viral speed of “#BLM” and “Black Lives Matter” took on a weight and velocity that the Rodney King generation of 1991 never could have imagined. After the King beating video was released in 1991, the nation appeared to give the justice system the opportunity to right the wrong that had been committed. Public outrage erupted after the police officers in the King beating were acquitted by a jury. The criminal justice system failed and it protected its own. When George Floyd was murdered nearly 30 years later in 2020, combined with all the countless unvindicated deaths preceding him, the nation knew that it could no longer rely on and wait for the slow wheels of justice to run us over. The justice system lost its credibility as the fair and objective arbiter of right and wrong. To be clear, it is not as if police killing of Black people had necessarily increased or was something new, but the proliferation of videos provided “objective” and indisputable

4. While we appreciate and acknowledge that Indigenous people and other People of Color have unique and different histories with the criminal justice system, it is beyond the scope of this brief to address the multitude of distinctions and similarities. As a fund that is focused on the AAPI community, the intent of this brief is to address the role our communities must play in our criminal justice crisis.

evidence to what Black voices had been saying for centuries. Waiting for the justice system to convince a jury of our peers that what we see before our eyes is an illusion was no longer an option. With the increasing number of social media stories and videos IRL, or “in real life,” of police killing unarmed Black citizens, the false narratives regarding the victim’s backgrounds, the questions of “why didn’t he just comply,” and the unspoken presumption that a shooting was justified were increasingly exposed and discounted in high definition.

The Right did to “defund the police” exactly what they did to “Black Lives Matter”—they turned it into a bogeyman. Their false narrative for “defunding the police” promoted fear mongering where suburban homes would be pillaged and burned, women raped, and children trafficked by unbridled criminals wreaking havoc and terror against all law-abiding citizens. For others, the solution had to be a wholesale destruction

of the system that unabashedly and unrelentingly continues to kill Black people.

With a new generation that was able to deftly use social media to capitalize on messaging to the masses and a (former) president whose communication of choice to the nation’s citizens was limited to occasionally legible messages of 280 characters or less, the discussion about systemic discrimination and police reform would have a difficult time breaking out of social media consumerism and into substantive dialogue and meaningful reform. It seemed like the average citizen understood that police abuse and killing were wrong and that police would need to be accountable, but the pathways as to how that would work in practice were not very clear, stuck between the two polarized definitions of “defund the police.” The devil is most certainly dancing in the details.

THIS IS WHAT SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION LOOKS LIKE

There are much bigger conceptual and practical hurdles to overcome to have meaningful police reform and accountability. Imagine if all the police shootings that have gone viral in just the last year involved citizens instead of police officers: There would more likely than not be a criminal prosecution of those people who killed another person, albeit with varying levels of charges and verdicts. However, it is the fact that police officers are behind the deadly force that makes all the difference, thereby providing an umbrella of protection

simply as a result of their job title. Our nation’s laws and cases have (mis)created a concept called “qualified immunity,” which effectively immunizes (i.e., protects) police from ever facing any charges, let alone legal liability, for the death of another human being by virtue of the simple fact that they are police officers. In sum, “qualified immunity” means that an officer is not responsible for killing someone if their actions were “objectively reasonable” and they did not violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights.

Objective reasonability is often predetermined by the prosecutors who typically decline to bring charges against officers. In fact, even if the officer “mistakenly” believes that the victim was reaching for a weapon (perhaps a cell phone or wallet) and was in imminent fear of death or serious bodily injury, then the objective reasonability requirement has been met. Not surprisingly and consistent with nationwide police training, there is nary an officer-involved shooting in which an officer does not use the phrase “I was in fear for my life or someone else’s life.” There is even more confusion and misapplication of what are “clearly established statutory or constitutional rights.” For example, did the officer know that he was not supposed to place his knee on the back of a nonresisting individual for more than eight minutes? Is five minutes acceptable? Is there a prior case in which an officer was found to be using excessive force with the same maneuver and the same amount of time? Consider that if the standard is that there has to be an established precedent, when will there ever be a precedent? And how similar do the facts and circumstances have to be as two police shootings are *never exactly the same*.

In another example, Ahmaud Arbery was a 25-year-old Black man who was shot and killed while jogging in a neighborhood in a Georgia suburb by three men who chased him down and shot him. They were charged, tried, convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Now imagine, if those three men were police officers but every single fact in that case remained the same: They would most likely never have faced any criminal charges, let alone a trial and conviction. This is how qualified immunity works in favor of police officers and against the disproportionate number of Black men and women killed by them. Not surprisingly,

many district attorneys are loath to prosecute police officers who conduct the arrests, investigations, and enforcement of the criminal code against all the nonpolice criminals that make up the majority of their criminal docket. Prosecutors rely on their officers to help them make their cases and if those officers are charged as criminals, the other cases those officers were involved in and future cases by that department lose credibility and the collaboration crumbles.

Eliminating and reversing the state of today’s policing will require more than the elimination of a “few bad apples.” Our nation’s policing system is rooted in our nation’s history of slavery and its concomitant institutionalized anti-Blackness. Modern-day policing was borne out of “slave patrols” that were founded in southern U.S. cities in the early 1700s to enforce slave codes and prevent slave uprisings.⁵ Using the power, resources, and authority of the government to ensure that slaves and freed slaves were “law abiding” developed into southern police departments.⁶ “Part of the early police’s post–Civil War duties was to monitor the behavior of newly freed slaves, many of whom, if not given their own land, ended up working on plantations owned by whites and to enforce segregation policies as per the era’s new Black Codes and Jim Crow laws.”⁷

Modern-day policing endures against communities of color through “crimmi-gration”—the intersection of immigration

5. Connie Hassett-Walker, *How You Start Is How You Finish? The Slave Patrol and Jim Crow Origins of Policing*, January 11, 2021. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/how-you-start-is-how-you-finish/

6. *Id.*

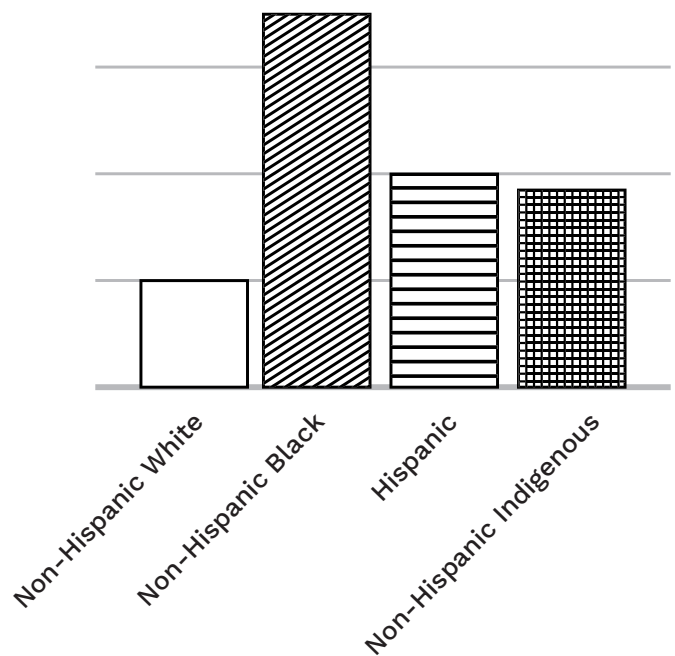
7. *Id.*

enforcement and criminalization—and has deep impacts on the AAPI community. For example, there is a long history of collaboration between the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and state and local law enforcement agencies under Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which effectively deputizes state and local police to act as federal immigration agents. This program, in particular, has increased Asian and Latinx interactions with police contact, and thereby, police violence. The intersections of the “school-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline” involve important issues that deserve a substantial amount of research and dedication outside of this piece, but it is offered here as an acknowledgment that although AAPIs are involuntarily hidden and diluted in many national conversations, they are critical beneficiaries of police and systemic reform.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

Not surprisingly, the vestiges of slavery continue today. Even with substantial underreporting (i.e., as high as 50%) of police shooting fatalities, from 1980 to 2019, **the rate of death as a result of police violence is 3.5 times higher for non-Hispanic Black people than the rate for non-Hispanic White people.**⁸ **The estimated rate for Hispanic people of any race is nearly two times higher than non-Hispanic White people.**⁹ **The estimated rate for non-Hispanic Indigenous people is also nearly two times higher than non-Hispanic White people.**¹⁰ Noticeably absent from the data and statistics regarding police shootings is the racial subcategory of “Asian” or “AAPI.” This is partly due to the lower relative percentages of Asians in the general population, but it is also due to lower numbers of fatal interactions with police. While AAPIs do not face a similar rate of brutality that other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) do, they are by no means immune to becoming

Police Shooting Fatalities
1980-2019



8. *Fatal Police Violence by Race and State in the USA, 1980–2019: A Network Meta-regression*, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01609-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01609-3/fulltext)

9. Id.

10. Id.

victims of the same system. Because AAPIs are typically “othered” in available data and research, it is difficult to present the quantitative value as a critical component to the qualitative need for AAPIs’ participation in reform efforts. Much of the data is limited to states with larger concentrations of AAPIs, such as California and Hawai’i. For example, as reported in “Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders Behind Bars”:

During the prison boom of the 1990s, the AAPI prisoner population grew by 250%. During this time, Asian juveniles in California were more than twice as likely to be tried as adults, as compared to white juveniles who committed similar crimes. Arrests of AAPI youth in the United States increased 726% from 1977–1997. In cities such as Oakland, AAPI youth have had very high arrest rates: Samoans with 140 per 1000— the highest rate in the city, Cambodians with 63 per 1000, and Laotians with 52 per 1000.¹¹

Moreover, the work of the Asian Prisoner Support Committee (APSC) has highlighted the deficiencies and limitations of disaggregated AAPI/“Other” data in Bureau of Justice Statistics data.¹² APSC identified that individuals in the “other” category (i.e., AAPIs, Native Americans, and potentially mixed-race people) have an imprisonment rate at more than three times the rate for White people. Perhaps the most egregious inadequate data limitations involve Indigenous communities, including Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs). NHPIs are often lumped in with the “other” category, notwithstanding substantial differences in demographic data and outcomes. For example, Honolulu Police Department’s 2019 Use of Force Annual Report provided that 35% of its uses of force were against NHPIs, an increase from the previous year’s 31% rate.¹³ NHPIs make up 10% of Hawaii’s population.

AAPI participation in police reform is far from being an altruistic endeavor as the community is not immune from police violence. For example:

CHIASHER VUE, a 52-year-old Hmong American was shot and killed by Minneapolis, MN police officers on December 15, 2019. Because of his race and limited English, he was shot and killed by dozens of MPD officers.

- o The Hennepin County District Attorney’s office determined it was a justified shooting.
- o A civil rights lawsuit has been filed.¹⁴

11. https://www.searac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/18877-AAPIs-Behind-Bars_web.pdf (internal citations omitted).

12. <https://www.asianprisonersupport.com/apsc-survey-data>

13. <https://www.civilbeat.org/2020/11/report-honolulu-police-use-of-force-increased-last-year/#:~:text=HPD%20officers%20used%20force%20more,per%201%2C000%20calls%20for%20service.&text=There%20were%20significant%20racial%20disparities,was%20used%20against%20last%20year.&text=They%20made%20up%207.4%25%20of,and%204%25%20of%20Hawaii's%20population>

14. Je Yon Jung is the lead attorney on this federal civil rights lawsuit against the Minneapolis Police Department.



ANGELO QUINTO, a 30-year-old Filipino American U.S. Navy veteran was killed by an Antioch, CA police officer who knelt on his back for nearly five minutes (similar to the manner of death for George Floyd) on December 23, 2020. He died three days later. Quinto was unarmed and suffered from mental illness.

- o The Contra Costa District Attorney's office investigation is pending.
- o A civil rights lawsuit has been filed.

CHRISTIAN HALL, a 19-year-old Chinese American adoptee was shot and killed by Pennsylvania State police officers on December 30, 2020. After perpetuating a false narrative that Hall was advancing toward the police with a gun, unredacted video footage was released nearly a year later that contradicted the officer's claims. Hall's hands were raised above his head when he was shot by the police. Hall did not have a firearm and he suffered from mental illness.

- o The Monroe County District Attorney determined that it was a justified shooting and that it was a "classic suicide by cop scenario."

RESCUE ARAM, a 31-year-old Guamanian was shot and killed by San Marcos, TX police officers on April 10, 2021. The officers alleged that he had a knife. He did not have a firearm.

- o Investigations by three different agencies are pending.
- o It is unknown if a civil rights lawsuit has been filed.

IREMAMBER SYKAP, a 16-year-old Micronesian was shot eight times and killed by Honolulu, HI police officers on April 5, 2021, after a high-speed chase. He was unarmed.

- o On June 17, 2021, Honolulu police officer Geoffrey H. L. Thom was charged with murder by the Honolulu prosecutor. Two other officers have been charged with second-degree attempted murder. Body camera footage contradicted the officer's statements. Notably, two weeks earlier, a grand jury declined to indict the officers.
- o A civil rights lawsuit has been filed.

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SOLUTIONS

The racial justice uprising in the summer of 2020 became the lightning rod for people, especially young people, who would not be satisfied with superficial and incremental reforms. For example: **A 2020 presidential election poll, co-sponsored by the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund, asked respondents the following questions:**

“Police need to be held accountable for their actions when they kill or abuse (Black/African American) people. We should get rid of laws that make it hard to prosecute police officers, so they face justice like everyone else.”

Support:
84% Black
83% Latinos
75% Asians
70% American Indians
63% Whites

“We need police reform to stop the killing and abuse of African Americans, Latinos and People of Color. We need to ban chokeholds and strangleholds, and greatly reduce police shooting at suspects.”

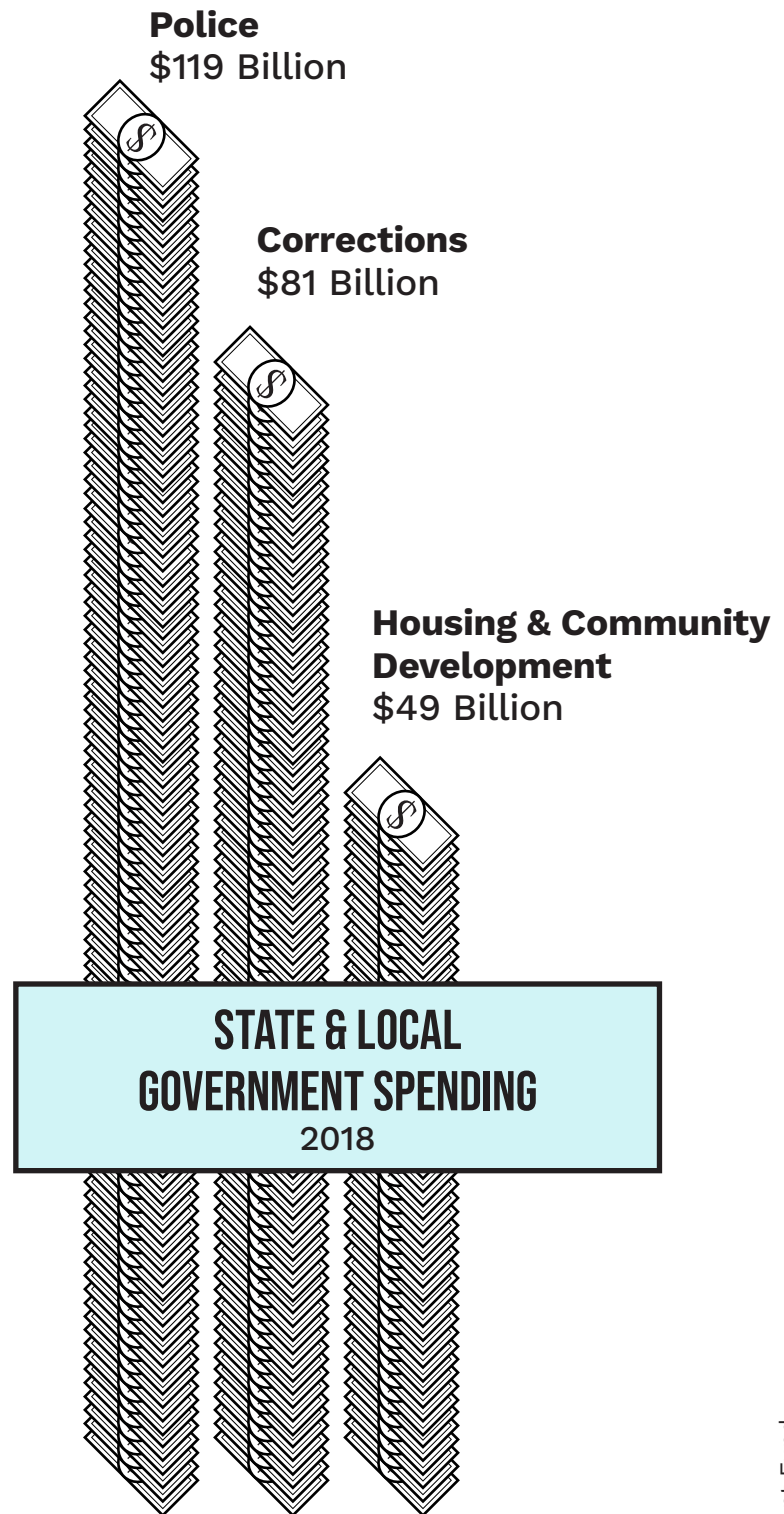
Support:
94% Blacks
86% Latinos
83% Asians
80% American Indians
72% Whites

These polling data strongly support the proposition that an overwhelming number of people fundamentally understand that police “abuse” and the unjustified killing of Black people is bad. “Defunding the police” became a rallying cry to end police violence. Instead of focusing on what is being taken away or “defunded,” there should be more transparency as to the amount of funding that goes into policing, what it is used for, and what services were previously “defunded” to reallocate such funding to the police state. Billions of dollars have been spent on funding the policing state and thereby defunding our communities from more effective and efficient strategies for making our communities safer. In 2018, for example, state and local governments spent \$119 billion on police and \$81 billion on corrections for a combined \$200 billion.¹⁵ In contrast, \$49 billion was spent on housing and community development. Police spending tripled over the last 40 years since

15. Urban institute: <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/state-and-local-finance-initiative/state-and-local-backgrounders/criminal-justice-police-corrections-courts-expenditures#Question1Police>

1977 from \$42.3 billion to \$115 billion in 2017. Police department appropriations generally account for the largest share of the budget in 35 of the 50 largest cities.¹⁶

A significant amount of taxpayer dollars also goes into increased militarization and weaponization of police. A Department of Defense program known as the 1033 Program provides local law enforcement agencies access to military-grade equipment that would otherwise be destroyed because it was no longer useful to the military. More than 8,000 law enforcement agencies have utilized the 1033 Program to access more than \$6 billion worth of military equipment such as night-vision goggles, machine guns, armored vehicles, bayonets, grenade launchers, and military aircraft.¹⁷ Police agencies spend more time and money training police officers how to shoot their firearms than when not to use their firearms. A small portion of policing budgets are dedicated to de-escalation training and many states do not make it mandatory.¹⁸ For example, a 2015 survey from the Police Executive Research Forum found that among 280 law enforcement agencies, new officers received 58 hours of firearm training and 8 hours of de-escalation training.¹⁹ Setting aside the question of whether the de-escalation training that is provided is meaningful and substantive, this data simply highlights the superficial commitment to preventing unnecessary shootings.



16. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/06/26/how-much-money-goes-to-police-departments-in-americas-largest-cities/112004904/>

17. <https://charleskochinstitute.org/stories/militarization-of-police/>

18. <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2017/05/05/police-de-escalation-training>

19. Ibid.

Even a smaller portion of police budgets is dedicated to mental health training and responding to someone undergoing a mental health crisis. Arguably, the general public is aware of the colloquial phrase “suicide by cop.” However, it is a misnomer because it creates a convenient narrative abdicating police responsibility for killing someone with a mental illness and fails to highlight the substantial number of avoidable and needless deaths of individuals with a mental illness. Indeed, according to one estimation, people with untreated mental illness are 16 times more likely to be killed by law enforcement.²⁰ In addition, local taxpayers funded more than \$300 million in 2019 alone defending against and/or settling wrongful death and civil rights lawsuits.²¹ In short, hundreds of billions of dollars are spent annually to ensure that police are heavily armed with little to no training to de-escalate and provide meaningful and proportional responses to the majority of situations that do not require deadly force. The irreversible outcomes and the disproportionate number of deaths against Black people do not make *any* community safer.

There are some who advocate for increased diversity or representation of communities of color in law enforcement. This is not the answer. The inequities and foundations of discrimination cannot be overturned by placing more People of Color at the helm of this inherently racist system. AAPIs, or any other People of Color, are not immune from committing police violence. For example, Peter Liang, a Chinese NYPD officer, shot

20. <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/key-issues/criminalization-of-mental-illness/2976-people-with-untreated-mental-illness-16-times-more-likely-to-be-killed-by-law-enforcement>

21. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/millions-lawsuit-settlements-hidden-cost-police-misconduct-legal/story?id=70999540>



Photo courtesy of Filipino Advocates for Justice

and killed Akai Gurley, a Black man in 2014; Tou Thao, a Hmong Minneapolis PD officer, was involved in the death of George Floyd, a Black man in 2020; as well as the previously mentioned examples wherein AAPIs were killed by one or more AAPI police officers. Thus, calls for increasing the diversity or the number of police officers of color to police “their own” communities wholly misses the mark and dangerously ignores the systemic racialized and anti-Black underpinnings of the police state.

Police reform and progress cannot happen around the edges. The foundational underpinnings of why law enforcement came to be, how it evolved, and its future trajectory are critical to dismantling the toxic components, if not a wholesale refresh. AAPIs, in particular, have a role in ensuring that we are not used as pawns and impermissible scapegoats for avoiding these difficult conversations and reforms. It is critical that we align our solutions regarding any targeted violence against AAPIs with the systemic reforms advocated by BLM and similar progressive Black organizing groups.

AAPI COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There are shifts happening across the country, and many of those shifts involve AAPI advocates and community organizers. For example:

o Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM), an organization founded and led by Southeast Asian youth in Providence, Rhode Island, led the work to pass a landmark comprehensive police reform package, including banning racial profiling, requiring video recordings by police, increasing data collection, reinstating a civilian oversight review board, and other reforms. PrYSM collaborated with other multiracial and undocumented Latinx groups and residents to spearhead this legislation.

o In Dane County, Wisconsin, Freedom Inc., a community organizing group that engages low- to no-income communities of color to achieve social justice through coupling direct services with leadership development and community organizing, worked on a solidarity campaign with Black students to successfully eliminate police presence in Madison School District schools in 2020.

o The Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL), a multiethnic community organization in Minnesota, worked with its partners in the Asian Minnesotan Alliance for Justice to introduce a ballot measure to remove the MPD from the Minneapolis city charter and replace it with a public-health-oriented Department of Public Safety. While the measure was defeated 56% to 44%, the group continues to work on local efforts to invest in alternatives to policing.

Upending the status quo is never an easy path but it is necessary because our current social contract is broken for everyone. There are efforts across the country to redefine what policing needs to be and whether it aligns with what our community needs it to be. The movement to “defund the police” is rerouting funding to areas such as health care, education, substance and mental health services, housing, employment, and so forth. All these areas have proven to provide meaningful and sustained progress for our communities, decrease crime rates, and, perhaps most importantly, reduce substantially unlawful and unnecessary killing by police officers. While Congress continues to struggle with a meaningful police reform package, local actions include legislation mandating the purchase and use of body-worn cameras and dash cameras; eliminating military-grade weapons; eliminating chokeholds and five-point restraints; eliminating utilization of the DOD 1033 Program purchasing agreements; funding qualified mental health and substance abuse

professionals as unarmed first responders; removing gang databases; and eliminating school resource officers in schools to remove the school-to-prison pipeline.

There is an increasing number of “progressive” prosecutors who are being elected on commitments to change the way in which police shootings are reviewed, investigated, and prosecuted, among other things.²² Police officers are now more frequently being criminally charged and even convicted for the death of citizens who interact with them. Juries are becoming more acclimated to the notion that police are not inherently

22. For example, “Fair and Just Prosecution” or FJP brings together elected local prosecutors as part of a network of leaders committed to promoting a justice system grounded in fairness, equity, compassion, and fiscal responsibility. These recently elected leaders—and the vision they share for safer and healthier communities—are supported by FJP’s network through ongoing information sharing, research and resource materials, opportunities for on-the-ground learning, in-person convenings, technical assistance, and access to national experts. <https://fairandjustprosecution.org/about-fjp/our-work-and-vision/>

more trustworthy than other witnesses and evidence. There is a shift happening, albeit whether that shift is happening at the breadth, depth, and speed that is required is, and should continue to be, the subject of vigorous debate.

Reform will take a seismic paradigm shift that redefines safety of our bodies as a fundamental component to protecting all our communities. Police reform to minimize and eliminate systemic discrimination is not a zero-sum game. Reacting to one injustice without the repercussions to other communities undermines the need for wide-reaching systemic reforms. The concept of “defunding” the police is not a radical concept given the origins of how the institution of policing began and how it has grown. It may seem radical because we have gone so far in the direction of accepting these structures as necessary and critical to our survival that we have collective amnesia regarding its racist origins and its continued discriminatory designs. We cannot wait for another state-sanctioned murder IRL to wake us from our systemic stupor. It is imperative that AAPIs actively participate in fundamentally changing our society’s approach to policing and safety. Failing to do so is at our peril.



Photo courtesy of Coalition of Asian American Leaders (MN)

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ABOUT THE AAPI CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FUND

The AAPI Civic Engagement Fund was established in 2013 with the mission to foster a culture of civic participation within AAPI communities by supporting the growth of AAPI groups as organizational-movement and power-building leaders that achieve specific policy, systems, and transformational change. It holds the vision that AAPIs must be an integral part of strengthening America's democracy, in advocating for improving the quality of life for all, and in creating vibrant multiracial communities.

www.aapifund.org / www.movementhub.org.

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