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May 23, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 240 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the undersigned organizations, we welcome the introduction of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act in the 118th Congress as a first step toward changing the conversation in Congress on police reform and true public safety. Comprehensive police accountability measures must go hand-in-hand with investments in initiatives that strengthen communities and prevent violence through evidence-based, non-carceral programs that approach community safety through the lens of public health.¹

After George Floyd's murder in 2020, we and hundreds of other groups sent Congress a letter outlining accountability principles that must be adopted to address rampant, systemic, white supremacy in policing across America.² We appreciate that Congress has introduced legislation that attempts to hold true to some of these accountability principles, seeking to advance systemic reforms rooted in transparency. We do, however, believe the bill can be improved and that there are opportunities to strengthen some of the bill's provisions, including those on "no-knock" warrants and police militarization. Finally, this legislation must be accompanied by policies providing the necessary investments in our communities that will lead to real safety.

To fully reckon with our nation's history of violent, discriminatory policing, Congress must also move away from the punishment-first policies that neither make us safe nor serve justice

¹ See, e.g., "Vision for Justice." *The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights*. 2024. <https://www.visionforjustice.org/>; "Community Safety Legislative Agenda for 2024." *Community Safety Agenda*. 2024. <https://communitysafety.us/community-safety-legislative-agenda/>; "Framework for Public Safety." *NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.* Feb. 2023. <https://www.naacpldf.org/framework-for-public-safety/>.

² Letter from The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, et al., to Congressional Leadership. June 1, 2020. [http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/policy/letters/2020/Coalition Letter to House and Senate Leadership on Federal Policing Priorities Final 6.1.20.pdf](http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/policy/letters/2020/Coalition%20Letter%20to%20House%20and%20Senate%20Leadership%20on%20Federal%20Policing%20Priorities%20Final%206.1.20.pdf).

for anyone. These policies have led to the targeting of Black and Brown people by law enforcement and the public³ based on a dangerous and wrongful association of Blackness with criminality.⁴ Elected officials and policymakers have made our communities less safe by upholding outdated policies that continue mass incarceration of Black and Brown people⁵ and perpetuate a history of structural racism and anti-Blackness in this country. These harsh policies also disproportionately affect those with intersecting or other marginalized identities – for example, people with disabilities are at heightened risk for harm from police encounters and are disproportionately incarcerated.⁶

We cannot arrest or imprison our way to safety. We must look to build safety by investing in the actual communities suffering from violence, implementing proven prevention strategies, and investing in the resources and systems that make all communities thrive. Investing in programs and strategies that address the root causes of instability in communities is the most effective way to keep people safe and enhance community wellbeing,⁷ and is also more popular with the public than harsher criminal laws.⁸

³ See, e.g., Smith, Jonathan, et al. “Investigation Report and Recommendations regarding Elijah McClain.” *City of Aurora, Colorado*. Pgs. 18-19. Feb. 22, 202. [https://cdn5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_1881137/File/News%20Items/Investigation%20Report%20and%20Recommendations%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://cdn5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_1881137/File/News%20Items/Investigation%20Report%20and%20Recommendations%20(FINAL).pdf) (911 caller described Elijah McClain as “sketchy” and “suspicious”).

⁴ See, e.g., Eberhardt, Dr. Jennifer L., et al., “Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol 8(6). 2004. Pgs. 876-93. <https://web.stanford.edu/~eberhard/downloads/2004-SeeingBlackRaceCrimeandVisualProcessing.pdf>. See also Payne, Brian Keith. “Prejudice and Perception: The Role of Automatic and Controlled Processes in Misperceiving a Weapon.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol 81(2). 2001. Pgs. 181-92. <http://web.missouri.edu/~segerti/capstone/PayneBias.pdf> (finding that exposure to Black faces facilitated the categorization of crime-relevant objects).

⁵ See Sawyer, Wendy, and Wagner, Peter. “Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024.” *Prison Policy Initiative*. March 14, 2024. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2024.html>; “Race and ethnicity.” *Prison Policy Initiative*. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/race_and_ethnicity/ (noting that while Black people make up only 13 percent of the population of the United States, they comprise 37 percent of people in jails and prisons, and 48 percent of people serving life, life without parole, or “virtual life” sentences).

⁶ See, e.g., U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. “Guidance for Emergency Responses to People with Behavioral Health or Other Disabilities.” Pg. 2. May 2023. https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-05/Sec.%2014%28a%29%20-%20DOJ%20and%20HHS%20Guidance%20on%20Emergency%20Responses%20to%20Individuals%20with%20Behavioral%20Health%20or%20Other%20Disabilities_FINAL.pdf; Bixby, Lauren, et al. “The Links Between Disability, Incarceration, And Social Exclusion.” *Health Affairs*. Vol. 41 (10). Oct. 2022. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2022.00495>; Legal Defense Fund & Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law. “Advancing An Alternative to Police: Community-Based Services for Black People with Mental Illness.” July 6, 2022. <https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-LDF-Bazelon-brief-Community-Based-Services-for-MH48.pdf>.

⁷ See, e.g., Bondurant, S. et al. “Substance abuse treatment centers and local crime.” *Journal of Urban Economics*. Vol 104, Issue C. 2018. Pgs. 124-133; Sharkey, P. et al. “Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime.” *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 82(6). 2017. Pgs. 1214-1240; Heller, S. et al. “Thinking Fast and Slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Vol 132(1). 2017. Pgs. 1-54. <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/132/1/1/2724542>.

⁸ Bryant, Erica. “Polling Shows Voters Prefer Crime Prevention Over Punishment.” *Vera Institute of Justice*. Sept. 26, 2023. <https://www.vera.org/news/polling-shows-voters-prefer-crime-prevention-over-punishment>.

We look forward to discussing with you the ways in which this legislation can be improved, from ensuring accountability and transparency in its disbursement of funds to police to addressing concerns about specific provisions within the bill, as well as our overarching vision for affirmative investments in community safety. Should you have any questions, please contact Chloé White, senior policy counsel, justice, at The Leadership Conference, at white@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Civil Liberties Union
American Humanist Association
Amnesty International USA
Arab American Institute
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Black Women's Roundtable
Children's Defense Fund
Church World Service
Color of Change
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Drug Policy Alliance
Earthjustice
Equal Justice USA
Equality California
GIFFORDS
Government Information Watch
Hip Hop Caucus
Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights First
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Innocence Project
Japanese American Citizens League
Lawyers for Good Government
League of Women Voters of the United States
NAACP
National Association of Social Work
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
National Community Action Partnership
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of Negro Women
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Education Association
National Legal Aid & Defender Association
National Organization for Women
National Urban League
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
PFLAG National
SEIU
The Sikh Coalition
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund
Stand for Children, Inc.
Transgender Defense & Education Fund (TLDEF)
UnidosUS
Union for Reform Judaism
Vera Institute of Justice
World Without Genocide
YWCA USA