

JUNE 24, 2020

## MAYOR TURNER:

We are a group of community-led organizations calling on you to reimagine policing and what truly makes us safe. The current protests across the nation and our city—after the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor brought to a head the epidemic of police killings of Black people—are just the latest signs of this nation’s crisis in policing. It is [a crisis that we are all too familiar with in Houston](#), where in recent years, the Houston Police Department’s actions to change specific policies—like the use of no-knock warrants—came about only as a result of tragedy. Now, the brutal murder of George Floyd, a Houston native who called our city home, is spurring another conversation about policing. People have been flooding the streets in protest, calling for changes in the way we police, demanding transparency, oversight, and accountability, and asking our elected officials to redirect resources from the police budget to supporting social services that have been proven to dramatically increase public safety.

As Mayor, you hold the unique power to reimagine public safety solutions through strategic policing reforms and investing in social service programs. We are asking that you support the following initiatives:

- ▲ **Implement a Cite and Release Program:** Since 2014, an estimated 20% of arrests made by the Houston Police Department have been for offenses where no arrest was necessary under state law. The City of Houston should adopt a cite and release policy modeled after best practices in other cities, so that police officers must issue citations for certain low-level misdemeanors instead of making arrests. A good cite and release policy will do the following: (1) Apply to all the misdemeanors eligible under state law, including Class C Misdemeanors, possession of marijuana, and driving with a license invalid; (2) Prohibit arrests for any of these offenses except in very limited circumstances having to do with public safety, and require a supervisor’s sign off when these exceptions are made, and; (3) Implement regular tracking with publicly released information showing how often the cite and release policy is being used and how often arrests are used for any of these offenses, including reasons for arrests.
- ▲ **Redirect budget allocations from the Houston Police Department to social service agencies better suited for emergency first response.** During the last city council meeting, you expressed your support of an emergency first responder program and reaffirmed that commitment to supporting such a program at a [June 19th](#) roundtable discussion with Senator John Cornyn and Senator Ted Cruz. As you noted then, “We ask our police officers to do way too much...[w]e asked them to police, we asked them to be social workers, we asked them to go out on crisis intervention, we asked them to deal with the homeless, we asked them to deal with domestic abuse and violence.” You have tasked the public safety committee with studying the program for implementation. Although HPD has [programs](#) theoretically designed to help people in mental health crisis, none of the current programs are an adequate substitute for sending out mental health professionals in person without police for mental health calls that do not appear to involve a gun or knife.

We thank you for your support and ask that you adopt a non-law enforcement emergency first responder program modeled after the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets ([CAHOOTS](#)) program in Eugene, Oregon. The City of Austin, closer to home, [has a similar program](#). To address

concerns on funding, most recently, cities like [Portland, Oregon](#), have taken steps to reallocate funds from the police budget to supporting non-law enforcement emergency first responder programs. Harris County Commissioners have also announced \$25 million in grant funds are available to municipalities that study and implement these programs.

- ▲ **Re-imagine the role of police unions:** Police unions have unparalleled power to shield police from accountability and to prevent reform. Unions employ opaque contract negotiations to create protections for police that are contrary to community interests and public safety. We are asking that you both open up negotiations to allow members of the public to participate and also sign a resolution notifying the police union of the city's intent to terminate its contract with the police department 90 days before it expires on December 31, 2020, unless the following changes to that contract are made: (1) End the 180 day rule that prevents officers from being disciplined for incidents occurring in the past; (2) End the 48 hour rule that prevents officers from being interviewed about complaints for 48 hours, and gives them access to all materials related to the complaint in advance. The department must be allowed to discipline an officer without fear of having that determination overturned in all cases where the allegations are proven to be true and a departmental policy was violated. Allegations of misconduct should only be expunged if there is a finding that the allegations are not true. (3) Fix the appeals process for disciplinary matters so that Independent Hearing Examiners are appointed by a civilian oversight board, rather than a committee of police officers; (4) Give the civilian oversight body real authority to investigate and discipline officers with complaints against them. Make the head of that body fully empowered to pursue police accountability independently; and (5) End the evergreen clause that causes the contract to stay in place even if no agreement has been made with the city.

On June 10th, you signed an Executive Order laying out several reform measures aimed at addressing use of force. While this was a laudable move, as [Chief Acevedo](#) himself noted in response, there is much more to be done to actually change and successfully implement these policies. You asked to hear [from the community](#) on this issue and we are urging you to (1) launch a public process to rewrite the General Orders related to use of force establishing standards and reporting of police use of deadly force, which includes the release of footage, reports, documents, and officers involved in reported incidents of use of force through public records requests; (2) revise all use of force policies, including limiting lethal force to immediate self defense or defense of others, requiring de-escalation and proportionate response, and explicitly banning chokeholds, strangleholds, shooting at a fleeing suspect or vehicle, or shooting anyone who is not armed with a gun situations when possible; (3) monitor how police use force and proactively hold officers accountable for excessive force by suspending the use of administrative leave for officers under investigation, withholding pensions, and prosecuting and not rehiring officers who have repeat involvement in excessive force cases; (4) keep officers off patrol until any investigation into a force incident is complete, including any investigation undertaken by the District Attorney's office.

Cities like [Austin](#), [Boston](#), [Los Angeles](#), [New York](#), and [Philadelphia](#) are already taking bold steps to reimagine policing and redirect resources from the police to initiatives like those mentioned here. As Mayor of the fourth largest city in the country, we are imploring you to join with other courageous leaders in adopting bold initiatives that prioritize people over policing and that have been shown to truly make us safer. And we urge you to act now, because justice can't wait.

SIGNED

