

## 350 LGBTQ orgs call for ‘transformational change’ in policing



[washingtonblade.com/2020/06/18/350-lgbtq-orgs-call-for-transformational-change-in-policing](https://www.washingtonblade.com/2020/06/18/350-lgbtq-orgs-call-for-transformational-change-in-policing)

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The recent protests against racism and police brutality are leading to calls for defunding police departments across the country. (Washington Blade photo by Michael Key)

More than 350 LGBTQ organizations from throughout the country signed onto a joint letter released on Wednesday by the Human Rights Campaign that calls for “divesting of public funds” from the nation’s police departments and “investing” those funds in communities.

"Ongoing police brutality and systemic racism has plagued this nation for generations and has been captured on video and laid bare to the public in the United States and around the world," the letter states. "These occurrences are stark reminders of a police system that needs structural changes, deconstruction, and transformation," the letter adds.

But similar to numerous other calls by advocacy groups for restructuring or defunding police departments that have surfaced since the May 25 police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis that triggered nationwide protests, the joint letter from the LGBTQ groups does not provide specific details on how much funding should be diverted from police budgets or whether police departments should be disbanded altogether as some are proposing.

The joint letter by the 350+ LGBTQ groups was released one day after D.C.'s Capital Pride Alliance and the D.C. Center for the LGBT Community sent an email to local LGBTQ activists urging them to contact the D.C. City Council to request that the Council "#DefundMPD," referring to the D.C. police department.

Although the Capital Pride-D.C. Center message did not call for a specific amount of funds that should be cut from the D.C. police budget, the message included links to other organizations, including Black Lives Matter D.C., some of which have called for reducing the D.C. police budget every year "until we get to zero."

Capital Pride Board President Wesley Smith said Capital Pride does not support a complete elimination of the D.C. police or the police budget. He said Capital Pride and the D.C. Center included links to the other organizations in their email message for educational purposes only so members of the community would become aware of the proposals of other organizations.

The joint letter by the 350+ LGBTQ groups released on Wednesday by HRC did not specifically call for eliminating police.

"Public funding should be shifted from police to reinvesting in our communities," the letter says in describing the first of four proposals for changing policing methods which it calls, Divesting of Public Funding From Police and Investing in Our Communities.

"Crime is often a symptom of scarcity and our frayed social safety net is sorely underfunded," the letter says in discussing the divesting proposal. "The United States spends twice as much on policing, prisons, and courts as it does on direct welfare programs" such as assistance to needy families, nutrition programs, and supplemental social security," it says.

"Congress, states, and local governments can reduce incidents of crime and create healthy communities by investing in direct assistance programs, affordable housing, education, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and early intervention programs (including violence interruption programs)," the letter says in describing the divesting proposal.

Another proposal calls for "shifting most first responder responsibilities" away from police to social services experts such as social workers and psychiatrists. "Inadequate healthcare and a lack of social safety nets have led to increased police interaction with individuals experiencing mental health crises," the letter says. "As a result, police officers are often called to assist in mental health emergencies, despite having little or no relevant training. This should change."

A third proposal calls for ending "predictive policing," a practice in which algorithmic techniques based on historic crime data are used to determine where to deploy police and to determine who is most likely to commit a crime, according to the joint letter.

"Not only does this dangerously reinforce discriminatory biases in the criminal justice system, resulting in over-policing of vulnerable communities, such as people of color and those from the LGBTQ community, but there is a lack of transparency from agencies that employ this method," the letter states. It says the so-called predictive policing practice should be discontinued.

The letter's fourth proposal calls for making police union contracts part of the public record and for holding police officers financially liable for excessive use of force or killings found to be unjustified. "Currently, police union contracts make it nearly impossible for civilians to view information about officers, including incidents of prior misconduct," the letter says.

"In doing so, police officers are shielded from accountability for their actions," it says. "The disciplinary history of a police officer whose personnel records are riddled with instances of misconduct and bad behavior should not be protected from public scrutiny." Changing union contracts to allow the public disclosure of this type of personnel records is needed "for public safety," the letter says.

"We, the undersigned, call out for change and call out for change now," the letter concludes. "There is no state, no municipal jurisdiction, and no law enforcement agency where transformational changes are not necessary and urgent," it says.

"When celebrating Pride Month this June, we must remember that the protests and riots from Compton's Cafeteria to Stonewall were sparked by Black and Latinx transgender women calling for police reform due to harassment and mistreatment of LGBTQ people," the letter points out.

"We remember this time as transformative, where we overcame our pain and fear for the ability to live a more authentic and free life," it says. "Today, we join together again to say that enough is enough. The time for structural change and transformation is now."

In a statement accompanying the letter, HRC President Alphonso David thanked the 350+ LGBTQ organizations that signed the letter for their solidarity in joining efforts to "rectify a legacy of white supremacy and anti-Black racism that continues to lead to police violence and killing Black people across the country."

Among the D.C. area LGBTQ groups that signed on to the letter include Annapolis Pride, Bet Mishpachah, National Center for Transgender Equality, National LGBTQ Task Force, National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, PFLAG National, Pride at Work, the DC Center for the LGBT Community, Whitman-Walker Institute, and Transgender Assistance Program Virginia.