

10 New Directions for Public Safety and Positive Community Change

During the current coronavirus pandemic, in which Black people have been disproportionately killed by COVID-19, the police are still killing us. George Floyd’s killing by officer Derek Chauvin, which has sparked nationwide unrest, occurred in Minneapolis, where the police department considers itself to be a champion of community policing, training on implicit bias, de-escalation, and early intervention to identify problematic officers. Yet that same department has for decades faced accusations of excessive force, particularly from Black residents. When we honestly face the recent history of Dallas – the killing by police of Botham Jean in 2018, Jason Harrison in 2014, and Clinton Allen in 2013, and countless others over the past half century – we know that our own city might well have been the center of such a storm. We need to change policing in Dallas. This statement outlines policy changes affecting police use of force, including deadly force, and budget priorities that differ from the status quo in their approach to public safety and community well-being.

Divest from the Police and Invest in the Community

1. DPD shall not be the first responder to mental health calls, unless a firearm is involved. Jointly, the City of Dallas and Dallas County shall create a program that assigns teams of mental health professionals or, as appropriate, other professionals in counseling and social work as first responders to mental health calls unless a firearm is involved outside of the police department. If a firearm is involved, these mental health teams will provide support to police officers responding; the mental health team may take the lead in a joint police/health response when appropriate (for example, threatened suicide with firearm).
2. City and County officials shall increase investment in alternatives to police response. The County Judge and the City of Dallas shall create a task force to identify and recommend alternative ways to respond to harm and to increase safety in the community, with budget allocations to sponsor the first initiatives in the coming budget year.

For example, DPD should *not* seek to deploy Texas state troopers in high crime neighborhoods, which floods an area with troopers who don’t know the community, whose typical work is much different than local police work, and which led to a deadly officer-involved-shooting (OIS) last summer in South Dallas. Instead, DPD should invest in alternative approaches, such as community-based violence prevention and interruption programs.

City and County officials should invest in practical ways to improve household income and living conditions in impoverished communities. Examples:

- funding to employ benefits advocacy counselors, who would interview and consult with households in a particular area regarding their eligibility for public benefits and assist households with necessary applications and paperwork.
- funding to employ housing assistance counselors in each Justice of the Peace court to assist tenants facing evictions with relocation expenses and helping with the cost of establishing a new residence.
- funding for employment counselors to provide hands-on assistance for residents to obtain work or better paid work, such as obtaining a commercial driving license, certification as a dental assistant, learning to program, etc.
- funding for social workers to provide hands-on assistance for residents to obtain a “medical home”, that is, a regular health care provider, and to obtain health insurance, and related health services.

- funding for small-scale practical neighborhood services provided by community groups, such as a van to carry seniors to and from the grocery store; lawn mowing services employing youth in the summer, etc.
- funding to increase environmental pollution monitoring, clean-up (for example, Shingle Mountain in Joppe), and restoration.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused economic distress beyond its immediate health threats. Instead of laying off staff during the current pandemic, the City and County should train and employ workers in contact tracing, which to be effective will require thousands. City and County employees are already vetted and have their paperwork in place, which should help streamline the startup of this essential initiative.

The City and County should provide funding for 24-hours recreation centers, with sports programs staffed by coaches and athletes, instead of police officers; should increase funding for arts programs, libraries, cultural centers; should provide funding for employment specifically of diverse groups of youth (trans, LGBTQ).

3. Dallas has become number one in deportation of immigrants, with the highest number of any U.S. city, and these deportations have impacted Black immigrants from Haiti and African nations disproportionately. The City of Dallas and Dallas County shall discontinue their intergovernmental service agreement (IGSA) with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and implement incarceration prevention measures for minor offenses – for example, broken tail light, driving without valid license, failure to signal, other non-violent offenses – that currently warrant booking, impounding a vehicle, or pretrial incarceration, which by triggering deportation lead to much more severe consequences than the original minor offense would bring to other residents.

Increase Safety and Accountability Measures

4. The City of Dallas and Dallas Police Department will adopt specific policies restricting the use of deadly force. Officers shall not shoot their firearms 1) if a suspect is unarmed; 2) if a suspect is running away or attempting to withdraw; 3) if a suspect is driving away or sitting in a parked car; 4) if a suspect is not armed with a firearm – for example, when a suspect is holding a knife, screwdriver, or blunt object; and 5) if the officer is alone – for example, after a solo foot chase.

In the event that deadly force is used, officers shall not shoot multiple times at a suspect without re-evaluating the necessity of additional deadly force.

5. DPD shall remove from armed patrol any officer involved in a use of deadly force incident until such time as all investigations have been completed, including review by a Dallas County Grand Jury.
6. DPD, in conjunction with the District Attorney’s office, shall review all fatal police shootings for the period 2000-2018. Reviewers will identify any policy changes that might have prevented a particular shooting, as well as recommending charges for any unlawful police activity uncovered.
7. DPD shall fire or furlough officers whose testimony for whatever reason is not credible enough to be used by prosecutors in court (“Brady” list of officers) or officers who have multiple complaints of excessive force.
8. DPD and Dallas County Sheriff’s Department shall create/review/reinforce policies concerning the “duty to intervene” to prevent officer misconduct and the “duty to render aid” when a person needs first-aid assistance as a result of officer conduct.

Duty to intervene: Officers have an obligation to protect the public. It shall be the duty of every officer to intervene when a fellow officer is using excessive force, inappropriate levels of force, or force that is no longer required to apprehend a suspect.

Duty to render aid: Officers have an obligation to protect the health and safety of any person held in custody. It shall be the duty of every officer to render timely and appropriate first-aid assistance needed as a result of officer use of force or health conditions aggravated by officer use of force. Officers shall be required to immediately determine the extent of a person's injuries or health needs and to provide reasonable assistance until emergency medical technicians (EMTs) arrive or the person is otherwise provided for.

9. The Dallas County Sheriff's Department and the Dallas County Commissioners Court, until such time as an effective vaccine and treatment are available for COVID-19, shall release from custody persons in Dallas County jail facilities who are aged 65 and older; who require quarantine because of a positive coronavirus test result; or who have existing health conditions that make them more susceptible to the coronavirus: chronic lung disease, asthma, diabetes, heart condition, liver disease, and other conditions identified by health professionals in ongoing research. The ability or inability of any current inmates to pay money bail shall not prevent their release under these conditions.

Dallas County officials shall commit to making every effort to reduce the jail population to the point where adequate social distancing is possible. For all remaining inmates, Dallas County officials shall guarantee adequate hand soap, hand-sanitizer, masks, testing, and effective social distancing.

10. City and County law enforcement must respect the diverse communities in the Dallas area, and effective policing depends upon awareness of the needs and circumstances of specific marginalized populations. For example, Dallas leads the nation in violence against transgender people. Moreover, recently on numerous occasions, Dallas police officers were found to publish on social media racial stereotypes, Islamophobic comments, and jokes about brutality against community members. As an important and reasonable accommodation for historically – and often currently – maligned groups, DPD and Dallas County Sheriff's Department shall document their interactions with any and all disenfranchised members of our community.