Courage to Act: Using Your Voice to Advocate for CHANGE!

The Racial Equity Task Force (RETF) recommends that you speak up in favor of systemic changes to transform our police.

This work is a long haul. Over time, the political landscape will change, and as it changes so too will the messages that we need to send to our political leaders. We hope that not only will you act NOW, but that you will stick with this transformational journey as it winds its way toward justice, and that you will continue to use your voice as needed and as called.

Your Voice MATTERS. Every time you speak up for justice, especially in unison, you move the world in a positive direction. If you are white, by speaking up you also help break the cycle of white silence that upholds white supremacy.

For now, the RETF recommends that you take three specific steps to advocate changes in our policing system:

1. If you are a Dallas resident, contact the City Council before Wednesday, Sept. 23, to advocate in favor of the Council’s proposed budget shift of $7 million from police overtime to other services. https://dallascityhall.com/government/Pages/contacts.aspx

2. If you are a Texas resident, take time this week to contact Governor Greg Abbott to tell him to stop threatening cities that decide to expand social services rather than add police, as Austin has done and Dallas has proposed.
Instead, urge the Governor that he and the Legislature should step forward with strong reforms to address qualified immunity and end police killings and police abuse of power. Training isn’t enough. Police need to know that misconduct will be punished, and that all life is sacred.

https://gov.texas.gov/apps/contact/opinion.aspx

3. If you are a North Texas resident, become a volunteer on behalf of the non-profit group, Mothers Against Police Brutality.

https://mothersagainstpolicebrutality.org/volunteer/

Urge the Dallas City Council to Shift Money from Police Overtime to Other Services

On Wednesday, September 23, the Dallas City Council will finalize its budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year. The Council has proposed cutting $7 million from the police overtime budget, and reallocating that money to other services, including affordable housing, an increase in the minimum wage for city employees, new bike lanes, and $2 million for traffic signals to improve traffic safety.

The overall police budget for Dallas for the upcoming fiscal year is more than $500 million.

The culture and system of policing in the United States, and here in Dallas, is heavily steeped in white supremacy. We need to envision and advocate for the transformation of that system from one trained and deployed as a para-military force into guardians of the communities they serve.

The City Council’s proposed reallocation of overtime funds is a small but positive step in the right direction.

TO CONTACT YOUR COUNCIL PERSON:

https://dallascityhall.com/government/Pages/contact_mcc.aspx
TO CONTACT THE MAYOR AND THE ENTIRE CITY COUNCIL:
https://dallascityhall.com/government/Pages/contacts.aspx

Urge the Governor to Stop Threatening Cities for Taking Positive Steps Toward Meaningful Police Reform

Over recent weeks both the cities of Austin and Dallas have taken (or, in Dallas’s case, have proposed taking) small steps to reallocate funds from the police to other services. The City of Austin cut its police budget by $20 million (taken primarily from training and overtime), and reallocated that money to permanent supportive housing and services, EMS for COVID-19 response, family violence shelter and protection, violence prevention, workforce development, and a range of other programs. As discussed above, the Dallas City Council has proposed reallocation of $7 million from police overtime to other services.

In response to these positive steps taken by the Austin and Dallas city councils, Texas Governor Greg Abbott has threatened to punish any Texas cities that take similar action by pushing legislation that would: a) strip those cities of their rights to annex (a primary tool for adding to a city’s tax base); and/or b) freeze the property tax rate of those cities.

Gov. Abbott has also publicly called on all candidates for public office in Texas to sign a pledge not to cut police budgets.

The RETF urges all Texas residents to contact Governor Abbott to urge him to:

1. Stop threatening Texas cities and political candidates for taking positive steps toward meaningful police reform; and
2. Step forward, instead, in support of legislative reforms that would:
   a. Eliminate the defense of qualified immunity in instances of police violence;
   b. Redefine the duties of police officers, by:
      i. Adding a duty to intervene against police violence
      ii. Adding a duty to identify fellow officers who violate the law
iii. **Adding** a duty to render aid to victims of police violence

iv. **Removing** the duty to arrest for all crimes (may arrest, but would no longer be mandatory)

c. Narrow the conditions under which force is permitted:
   i. Strict prohibition against chokeholds;
   ii. All force must be proportionate to the circumstance and the seriousness of the offense (to address using serious force over minor offenses) and must be accompanied by attempt to de-escalate, warning, and does not present risk to bystanders;
   iii. Eliminate certain previously allowable use of lethal force by requiring: imminent threat of serious bodily injury or death, no other lesser level of force could have worked, the use of force does not present a risk to bystanders, and the force terminates as soon as the threat is lessened.

d. End arrests for non-jailable, fine-only violations (formerly the Sandra Bland Act of 2019)

e. Require corroboration for the testimony of an undercover police officer in narcotics cases (just as corroboration is already required for non-police informants.) George Floyd was among 160 people notified by Harris County that his old conviction on drug charges, based solely on the testimony of undercover narcotics officer Gerald Goines, could be overturned. He never got the notice.

f. Require violations of policy and law by police to be set out in a clear, progressive disciplinary matrix that cannot be overturned or changed by contract with police union.

Each item from the list above will be part of the upcoming Texas **George Floyd Act**, sponsored by the Texas Black Legislative Caucus for the upcoming Texas legislative session, which begins in January 2021.

The RETF urges each of you to speak out **NOW** to Gov. Abbott in favor of any or all of these legislative police reforms.

**TO CONTACT GOVERNOR ABBOTT:**
Become a Volunteer for Mothers Against Police Brutality
https://mothersagainstpolicebrutality.org/volunteer/

Mothers Against Police Brutality (MAPB) is the voice of justice for victims of police brutality and deadly force. It is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic coalition uniting mothers and their allies nationwide to fight for civil rights, police accountability, and policy reform.

MAPB was founded in 2013 by Collette Flanagan, John Fullinwider and Sara Mokuria shortly after the police shooting of Collette’s son, Clinton Allen, in Dallas. With the help of many volunteers, MAPB has become a national model of advocacy and service for families who have been impacted by police brutality.

First Unitarian’s Racial Equity Task Force (RETF) is partnering with MAPB by recruiting volunteers who can assist with several local MAPB projects, including MAPBVoices, which spotlights families across the state and nation who have lost loved ones to police actions.

The RETF and MAPB will hold a Zoom meeting on Sunday, October 4th, from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. for church members to hear directly from MAPB staff and to find out how to become involved in this valuable service to the Dallas community. Zoom link here.