

May 6, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

RE: Federal Response to Police In-Custody Death of Freddie Gray

Dear President Obama:

We, on behalf of the clergy, community advocates and civil rights leaders identified in this letter, would like to thank your Administration for the support it has provided to Baltimore officials over the past six months as this city grapples with numerous incidents of excessive use of force and other acts of misconduct by Baltimore police. We now respectfully ask you to do more.

According to news reports, since 2011 approximately 100 Baltimoreans, primarily African Americans, ages 15 to 85, have suffered serious injuries or death at the hands of police, costing the city \$5.7 million in settlements and court judgments¹ and the African American community an unquantifiable toll. Consequently, Police Commissioner Anthony Batts asked the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (“COPS”) to conduct a collaborative review of the police department’s use of force practices. Even as the COPS Office launched its review in January 2015, two Black males have died after being in police custody - 30-year old Trayvon Scott in February 2015, and most recently 25-year-old Freddie Gray.² Last week, Baltimore’s State’s Attorney filed charges against the six police officers connected to Mr. Gray’s death. The Department of Justice has announced it will initiate its own criminal civil rights investigation, and we hope that these investigations will lead to a just outcome.

But, we remain concerned that the COPS Office’s collaborative review, which would be subject only to voluntary compliance by the police department, will not go far enough. Any recommendations for change would be limited to use of force practices, and there is no guarantee that any proposed changes will be implemented in the future under new city leadership. We believe that the pervasive and persistent police abuse against African Americans in Baltimore warrants an investigation by the Department of Justice of the most serious form. A pattern and practice investigation would ensure that other policing practices, such as pedestrian

¹ Mark Puente, *Undue Force*, Baltimore Sun, September 28, 2014, <http://data.baltimoresun.com/news/police-settlements/>.

² Jessica Anderson, *A Look at Recent History of Baltimore in-custody deaths*, Baltimore Sun, April 22, 2015, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-police-in-custody-deaths-20150422-story.html>.

and traffic stops and “rough riding,” allowing handcuffed persons to ride in police vans without seat belts, would be reviewed. Additionally, the recommendations would enjoy the force of law and would apply to subsequent local administrations.

As you stated in your recent remarks about police violence in communities of color, “This is not new, and we shouldn’t pretend that it’s new. The good news is that perhaps there’s some newfound awareness... that there are problems and challenges when it comes to how policing and our laws are applied in certain communities”³ We hope you are correct, and we stand ready to work with local, state, and federal officials both to raise awareness of issues of police violence and find solutions to this continuing crisis. However, as clergy and civil rights leaders whose members and clients have experienced police abuse, we must voice our collective concern about police violence in Baltimore that have occurred over decades and under various administrations.

Therefore, we respectfully ask you to urge newly appointed Attorney General Loretta Lynch to launch a civil rights pattern and practice investigation of the Baltimore Police Department.

Thank you for considering this request. We look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions or concern, please do not hesitate to contact Rev. Todd Yeary at styeary@gmail.com.

Sincerely yours,



Rev. Dr. S. Todd Yeary
Political Action Chair
MD State Conference of the NAACP



Sherrilyn A. Ifill
President and Director Counsel
NAACP Legal Defense Fund

³ Tanya Somanader, *President Obama on Freddie Gray’s Death: “This is Not New, and We Shouldn’t Pretend that It’s New*, The White House Blog, April 28, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/04/28/president-obama-freddie-gray-s-death-not-new-and-we-shouldn-t-pretend-it-s-new>.

On behalf of:

Bishop Oscar Brown
Rev. Odell Dickerson
Susan Goering, ACLU of MD
Bishop Clifford Johnson
Elder Carl A. Pierce, Sr.
Rev. Dr. Alfred C.D. Vaughn

Rev. Dr. Harold A. Carter, Jr.
Rev. Dr. Errol D. Gilliard, Sr.
Rev. Dr. Donte' Hickman
Elder Ron Owens
Bishop Walter S. Thomas, Sr.
Rev. Dr. Lisa M. Weah

cc: Loretta Lynch, U.S. Attorney General