

Homewood Friends Meeting, Baltimore  
PROPOSED  
Minute Regarding Systemic Racism and Violence

Although Quakers were the first religious body to protest African American slavery in the English colonies in 1688, they labored for generations before uniting to reject and work against the institutions of slavery, legally and through civil disobedience. As Quakers today, we recognize and mourn the reality that our nation was founded on the enslavement and brutal oppression of Black people. And we recognize that after four hundred years of enslavement and a civil war followed by profound amendments to the nation's constitution and civil rights laws, virulent white supremacy persists, sometimes full-throated, and often embedded in the everyday policies that shape American society.

We believe that all people are equal in the sight of God, and we must not stay silent about institutions that maltreat fellow human beings. We unite with the cry of millions that "Black Lives Matter." At this critical moment in the USA, Black people and people of color are concerned by the omnipresence of police violence and the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on communities of color. Systemic racism is evidenced by the senseless murders of countless Black people and by the increased risk of dying from COVID-19 from denial of health care and from over-representation in occupations on the front line of pandemic response.

Systemic racism is more than individual acts of hatred and is every bit as abhorrent. It is state-sanctioned violence that dehumanizes persons through policies that equip police like soldiers at war and insulate them when they harm and kill unarmed civilians; through unjust bail, sentencing and incarceration; through generations of segregation and dispossession from land, and disparities in healthcare and education. Our Quaker values impel us to seek equality for all people and not to be silent about such public policies, indeed, to work to end the systemic racism that denies the humanity of Black, brown and indigenous people since the founding of this country.

We commit ourselves to seek the transformation and redemption of the systems of violence that disproportionately harm and kill people of color, smothering communities and disregarding human needs during a global pandemic. We are moved by our compassion for Baltimore and distant communities, to unite with the Friends of African Descent and call for action that will "lead to justice, equity and full recognition of humanity for Black men, women and children in America."\* We too commit to "stand with those who have identified bigotry, racism and state-sanctioned violence as historical and continuing sources of senseless suffering and death" meted out disproportionately to Black people. We join in grieving the loss of Black lives – indeed, any human life, including police. Nonetheless, we must reckon with police practices that too often act as occupying forces designed not to protect resident communities but to serve wealthier and whiter notions of privilege and difference.

Particularly since the death of Freddie Gray in police custody in April 2015, our Peace and Social Justice Committee has held a deep concern for violence within Baltimore. As part of the Baltimore Ceasefire movement, we also recognize that violence and the tragic killing of innocent

civilians have touched many in our city. We [The Committee?] have come to the following conclusions:

- Too often, police officers and police departments use violence to achieve not peace but an inhumane notion of order.
- The epidemic of violence in our city, as in many others, reflects the violence of weapons and of public policies that have shredded economic safety nets across the nation;
- The forces of violence cannot be overcome by perpetuating vengeance and retribution;
- Gun violence, police misuse of lethal force, and racism are intimately linked problems whose causes are deeply rooted in structural inequality and fear.

Black Quakers have called upon us to realize that “the problems of racism, militarism and violence that we face are rooted in the deeper, less recognized sicknesses of materialism and greed. From the slave trade and plantation economies of the American South to the terroristic subjugation of Jim Crow to the modern-day profits of miseducation and mass incarceration, racial stereotypes have been used to mask and justify the exploitation and denial of economic human rights to people of African descent.”\* The recent killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, Elliott McClain and still others reflect these generations of injustice. Present-day policies that allow police to kill unarmed Black and brown people with impunity have the same effects of terrorizing people as KKK lynchings. We unite in the understanding that these policies must be stopped.

Our federal government spends \$100 billion every year on policing and another \$80 billion on incarceration. See Center for Popular Democracy, <https://populardemocracy.org/news-and-publications/how-much-do-us-cities-spend-every-year-policing>. Through the 1033 program it has sent over \$1 billion worth of military rifles, tanks, aircraft and battle gear to local and state law enforcement agencies. Our city police budget is more than half a billion dollars – more than twice what Baltimore spends on public schools, and twelve times more than the city spends on health. [Councilman Ryan Dorsey, https://twitter.com/electryandorsey/status/1268868843021230086?lang=en](https://twitter.com/electryandorsey/status/1268868843021230086?lang=en). Meanwhile, during a global pandemic, 30 million people have no health insurance, 40 million people are unemployed, 50 million people face hunger, and 60 million do not have living wages. [What is Systemic Racism? Poor Peoples Campaign, https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/national-day-of-fasting-and-focus/demands/](https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/national-day-of-fasting-and-focus/demands/). All of this disproportionately affects people of color, whom the legacy and currency of racism puts at high rates of unemployment, poverty, infection, death, excessive policing and lethal force. This time of COVID19 has served to spotlight these inequalities.

We recognize that dismantling systemic racism is a long-term commitment, one that is urgent and overdue. Because racism seeps into every aspect of society, this work requires structural, social and cultural change. The complexity and seeming intractability of these problems must not lead us to despair. The most fitting expression of our grief and outrage over violence, hate, and racism in our communities is spirit-filled action to work for peace and justice. Accordingly,

**We call on one another as Friends**, to listen, learn and act. Specifically,

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- to make a personal commitment to work to end such practices of oppression, whether perpetrated by private citizens or state agencies, and to bring about constructive change. The Black Quaker Project offers an introductory Anti-Violence Resource Guide, <https://www.theblackquakerproject.org/>, and anti-racism resources are identified by Baltimore Yearly Meeting, BYM Friends Commitments and Resources for Actions Supporting Racial Justice, many other Yearly Meetings, see Friends General Conference, <https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/yearly-meeting-work-racism>
- to commit some part of the substantial resources of Friends' organizations in which we serve to support this work.
- as a Meeting, to advance the actions proposed by Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Call for Action Against Systemic Racism to All our Monthly Meetings (attached).

**We call on the legislature and governor of Maryland** to end the continuing disproportionate use of violence against people of color in our communities.

**We call on Baltimore city leaders** to demilitarize the police, redirect police funding toward alternative crisis response programs, make new investments in Baltimore's communities of color, provide for independent investigation of excessive-force abuses, and provide for transparency in mandatory civilian oversight.

**We call on the US Congress** to pass meaningful police reform legislation to eliminate the violence of our policing system, remove the equipment of warfare from the police, and establish uniform nation-wide standards on the use of force by police in the performance of their duties.

\* Fellowship of Friends of African Descent, [Minute Regarding State Sanctioned Violence](https://www.pym.org/a-message-regarding-state-sanctioned-violence-from-fellowship-of-friends-of-african-descent/), 2016 Annual Gathering, <https://www.pym.org/a-message-regarding-state-sanctioned-violence-from-fellowship-of-friends-of-african-descent/>.