



## Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

Open Letter to Mayor Jenny Durkan, City Prosecutor Pete Holmes & Police Chief Carmen Best

The City of Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission demands justice and accountability from Mayor Jenny Durkan, City Prosecutor Pete Holmes, Chief Carmen Best on the continuous police brutality perpetuated by the Seattle Police Department (SPD) against Black residents, as well as the brute police force used in this past week's protests. We echo the demands of many community voices, including the [Black Lives Matter Seattle-King County chapter](#). The social contract has been broken and the world is watching. Extensive harm has been perpetuated by SPD and the criminal justice system. It is imperative that City and SPD leadership begin implementing recommendations from black and brown communities, prioritizing the experiences and voices of Black people. All lives cannot matter until Black lives matter.

If we are not all fighting for the liberation of Black people, then we are not fighting for our collective liberation. The immigrant rights movement cannot be distinguished from the fight for racial equity. Our work is rooted in the firm belief that all people deserve respect, dignity, and self-determination. We cannot ignore the disproportionate impact of state violence and police brutality against our community members, and the pervasive anti-blackness in our society and the laws that perpetuate it. With the increased discrimination that black immigrants and refugees face, it is our duty to call it out and fight. We recognize that these immigrant experiences are directly tied to the anti-blackness this country has upheld for centuries. As members of immigrant and refugee communities, we are engaging in our own anti-racist and anti-blackness work. City leadership - Mayor Durkan, City Prosecutor Pete Holmes, and City Council - must do the same.

The recent police killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, among many others, are not isolated incidents. We see killings by police here in Seattle, as well, in the murders of John T. Williams and Charleena Lyles. As recently as two weeks ago, an unnamed black man was killed in [Lower Queen Anne](#) by police not following de-escalation protocols. In March, Manuel Ellis was choked to death by police in Tacoma. We applaud the incredible outpouring of people in every state of this country saying ENOUGH IS ENOUGH and add our voices to the cry for justice.

We acknowledge the steps taken by City leadership such as lifting the city-wide curfew that was unconstitutionally enacted earlier this week and withdrawing the motion to end the federal [consent decree](#). But these steps are not enough. We deserve transparency and honesty. We do not want any more tears or to be tear gassed. We ask for action in changing policies and structures of oppressions, services that protect and improve our communities, and, most of all, reforms that hold the police officers and their leadership accountable for the abuse of power that they perpetrate on our communities. We thank the Seattle Councilmembers for their leadership in [standing with protesters](#) against police brutality.

The Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission demands the following:

**Discipline police who commit acts of violence, or do not follow protocol during the recent protests.** In the past several days, we have witnessed Seattle police engage in the same kinds of violent behavior that protesters are actively calling for an end to. We call on the City and SPD to:

- Cross-check records of past complaints with the recent 14,000 complaints filed and follow up with appropriate disciplinary action of the police officers and their leadership.
- Immediately ban officers from covering their badge numbers.
- Maintain the ban on officers from tear gassing or pepper spraying protestors permanently. We also note that this is a public health hazard, with gas seeping into homes and apartments, compromising respiratory function during COVID-19.
- Immediately ban the traumatizing use of blast balls/flash bangs, and rubber bullets.

**Immediately release and decline to prosecute protesters.** Our communities have the right to protest. By instituting a curfew, deploying militarized officers, and arresting peaceful protestors, the City and SPD have instigated conflicts and infringed on that right. We call on the Seattle City Attorney to prioritize lives over property by:

- Dismissing any pending charges against protestors.
- Declining to prosecute protestors.
- Prohibiting SPD from conducting further arrests of protestors.

**Adopt short-term strategies to decrease police brutality.** The Police are supposed to be in service of our communities, especially the vulnerable communities. Instead, we've continued to witness patterns of excessive force and racially biased policing that actively harm the Black community. We call on the City and SPD to:

- Immediately implement the recommendations from the federal consent decree.
- Prioritize ongoing de-escalation training.
- Adopt and implement all eight recommended practices from [8 Can't Wait](#) practices or [New Era of Public Safety Toolkit](#), specifically the following two the City has yet to adopt:
  - SPD officers must exhaust all alternatives before shooting, and
  - Ban shooting at Moving Vehicles.
- Commit to working with the Community Police Commission (CPC), AND adopt their recommendations in a timely manner.
- Demilitarize police equipment.

**Decrease the police budget.** In 2020, Mayor Durkan endorsed a \$401 million budget for the Seattle Police Department. We know that these levels of policing actively harm communities. Resources should be divested from SPD and invested back into the community, to services that communities need, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic. We call on the City to:

- Reduce the Seattle Police Department's budget by 50% in the upcoming budget review for the following expenses: FTE police officer positions, military buyback programs, and military-grade equipment, including high-power rifles and riot control equipment. In reducing the SPD budget, resources already allocated for [advocates](#) and [community engagement](#) should be spared.

- Redirect funds to be invested in community policing and outreach, community groups that serve adequate housing, healthcare, access to loans and grants for small businesses, education, free daycare, social services and mental health resources

The City has the resources and tools to engage in race equity work, yet has refused to apply them to its own leadership. We continue to call for the Mayor's office, SPD, City Council and City Attorney's office to apply the [City's own Social Justice Toolkit](#) in all of its initiatives, programs and budgets going forward.

This week, we have already seen transformational commitments occur. Other cities are leading the way on reducing police budgets and holding their police departments accountable. Mayor Garcetti of Los Angeles announced re-directing \$100- \$150 million from the police budget to social programs that support black and brown communities. All twelve Minneapolis City Councilmembers have unanimously signed onto a letter urging the Minnesota Department of Human Rights to use its *"full weight to hold the Minneapolis Police Department accountable for any and all abuses of power and harms to [their] community."* We challenge Mayor Durkan, Pete Holmes and Chief Best to lead with this kind of transformative change that starts the real anti-racist work.

Signed,

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission