



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

House of Representatives

State House, Boston 02113-1054

Chairman Aaron Michlewitz  
House Ways and Means  
24 Beacon St.  
Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133

Chairwoman Claire Cronin  
Joint Committee on the Judiciary  
24 Beacon St.  
Room 136  
Boston, MA 02133

***S2820: An Act to reform police standards and shift resources to build a more equitable, fair and just commonwealth that values Black lives and communities of color.***

Dear Chairman Michlewitz, Chairwoman Cronin, and fellow members of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Joint Committee on the Judiciary,

My name is Representative Liz Miranda representing the 5th Suffolk District in Boston and today I want to encourage us to pass bold legislation to begin to address structural racism and transform our Public Safety system in the Commonwealth. Thank you for your leadership in developing a process where electeds and our constituents can be heard.

I want to share my remarks that I believe will center the work toward Justice as a labor of love. This journey toward increasing accountability, creating standards and removing harmful practices is the work of the Legislature. I hope it will be seen as our collective walk toward Justice, a labor of love. I know that we can be stretched to go further and do better for the residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Over a month ago, we all watched in horror as Officer Derek Chauvin killed Mr. George Floyd. We heard about the non-knock warrants that led to police to barge into EMT Breonna Taylor's home and murder her while she was sleeping. And just weeks before, we learned of the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery as he went for a run in his community by three white men. For me, these stories are not new. We must act to end the dehumanizing suffering that these Americans experienced at the hands of law enforcement and private citizens.

As a Black woman from and representing the most of color district (94% of color) in the Commonwealth, I have lived in the most policed, criminalized, incarcerated, and one of the poorest census districts all of my life. It is also a place where there is high crime. We are not safer even with the over criminalization of our poverty and skin color. I know that policing in my community has been radically different than other



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communities and incredibly punitive since its inception. I grew up in a Roxbury neighborhood where I would watch my family be racially profiled and brutalized often, especially if we went too close to the South Boston or Dorchester community boundaries. We deserve to live in healthy, safe and communities full of opportunity without fear of harm from those meant to serve us or our fellow citizens. The anti-blackness rhetoric being fueled in this country is killing us.

I urge us to remember the words of Dr. King, in his speech the “*Fierce Urgency of Now*” as we will be making profound decisions and having historic debates that are long overdue. We cannot be too late, as the moment to make a difference is now.

*“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there “is” such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”*

I remember Sean Bell, Rodney King and Amadou Diallo who were killed or seriously harmed publicly when I was a teenager. I remember ten years ago hearing about Massachusetts resident and Pace College student, DJ Henry. DJ’s family has never received justice from the very system that took his life prematurely. Those images are permanently in my mind. I could spend fifteen minutes reading aloud all the names of the children, women, elders and men who have perished in this country from bad policing. Structural racism has always been here and it is an absolute factor in the 401 year history of this country, when the first Africans arrived on the shores of America; legal systems of oppression began for Black people. In Massachusetts, when Africans arrived in 1638 on the ship the *Desire*, they began their painful futures here as property, not people. In modern policing’s more than 160 years of history, racism has been embedded in its foundational purpose to protect and serve white, male landowners in Boston.

Incidents of violence have happened and continue to occur here in Massachusetts. Just last month, the Justice Department found a “pattern and practice of using excessive force” by the Springfield Narcotics Unit including officers administering blows to the head likely to cause head injury, and officers slamming people into the pavement and kicking them in the face and body. Most of these incidents went unreported. This is unacceptable conduct for any individual, but is especially egregious when it comes from police officers, who are supposed to keep us safe.

I filed HD.5128, *An Act to Save Black Lives* with Senator Cindy Creem over a month ago to fix centuries-old problems in policing laid bare over recent months. I have been speaking to hundreds of residents across this state regarding police accountability and reform. I have also spoken to and listened to Law Enforcement, especially those of color, who have shared their concerns about disparate treatment, racism, and believing that they were being seen as the enemy when many of them signed up to help their communities. I understand it is a dangerous profession, that many do not choose to enter precisely



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because of the requirements. I heard them as I heard from an overwhelming number of citizens who need us to act now to help Black and Brown people stay alive. Many of the residents I have spoken with have shared stories that are happening right here at home, about their civil rights being violated or about mistreatment at the hands of local police. For decades, we have been watching in horror as each new incident continues to further devalue Black lives.

We must have a higher standard for this noble profession. No one should be allowed to brutalize any citizen who has been sworn to protect and serve. The system has more than just a few “bad apples.”

I encourage you to fight for:

- Independent Oversight
- Ending Qualified Immunity
- Strengthening use of force rules
- Banning no-knock warrants
- Banning chokeholds
- Ending the use of Facial Recognition technology
- Banning tear gas & chemical weapons
- Ensuring that police misconduct is public record
- Establishing “duty-to-intervene” when officers witness abuse
- Improving Training for all Law Enforcement in this state
- Creating a Certification and Decertification system
- Protecting Black Immigrants by ensuring we end harmful practices
- Improving our current Civil Service System to give people of color expanded opportunity
- Creating commissions on Structural Racism and the historical impact on Slavery in Massachusetts

This is just the beginning. We have a great deal of work to do together. I feel strongly that these first steps will ensure that justice and equity is at the forefront of our minds and actions as a Legislative body. For Black lives to truly matter, we must fully invest in Black communities in ways we have never done, continue to abolish and reform harmful systems and policies, and change the legal bedrock of this country that has systematically severed people of color from opportunity and freedom.

This is what it will mean to add action to our words when we scream *Black Lives Matter*.

*Yours in Service,*

*Representative Liz Miranda*

*State Representative, 5th Suffolk District*