



July 17, 2020

The Honorable Rep. Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means

The Honorable Rep. Claire D. Cronin
Chair, Joint Committee on the Judiciary

Re: Testimony in Support of Police Accountability

Dear Chairs Michlewitz and Cronin,

On behalf of the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action (JALSA), I write in support of S. 2820. JALSA is a membership-based non-profit organization based in Boston, with many hundreds of members and supporters statewide. We are dedicated to being a strong, progressive, inter-generational voice, inspired by Jewish teachings and values, for social justice, civil rights, and civil liberties. We are devoted to the defense of civil rights, the preservation of constitutional liberties, and the passionate pursuit of social, economic, racial, and environmental justice for all.

Last month, Chasidic Jews in Brooklyn held a Black Lives Matter rally at which an organizer declared that the ability for police to kill citizens was a violation of Jewish divine law that should “call out to every Jew.” We agree. Yet the solution to this terribly important issue—the answer to this call—must come not through divine intervention through changes to Massachusetts law. Specifically, the legislature must impose serious limits on officer use of force, limit qualified immunity, prohibit face surveillance technology, and allow individuals without lawful immigration status to obtain driver’s licenses.

Law enforcement officers should not be allowed to strangle, shoot, or maim citizens as they choose. Officers, instead, should be required to de-escalate encounters, and use only the amount of force that is proportionate to the situation. But the lack of strict limitations on the use of force does not exist in a vacuum: the doctrine of qualified immunity essentially operates to deny accountability by shielding officers from liability for use of force, even when that force is egregious, leading to serious injury or death. Massachusetts citizens who suffer harm so serious should be entitled to their day in court.

We also ask that the House include a ban on surveillance technology in its bill. Face surveillance technology is known to be racially biased and less accurate at matching Black faces. Black people have been wrongfully arrested based on incorrect facial matches, an injustice we cannot allow to continue in this Commonwealth.

Finally, we ask that the House include the Work and Family Mobility Act (H. 3012), which would allow Massachusetts residents to obtain a driver's license, regardless of immigration status. If they are driving without a license, Black and Brown immigrants can be funneled into the criminal justice system and ultimately deported away from their families—a process that can begin with a simple, racially biased police stop. Passing this legislation is critical to allow Black and Brown immigrants to stay out of the criminal justice and deportation systems and to participate more fully in the life of the Commonwealth.

We urge you to adopt this legislation without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cindy Rowe". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the right of a vertical line.

Cindy Rowe
Executive Director
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
617-227-3000