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March 9, 2017

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When the national conversation around police involved shootings grew, the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys (APA), a leading organization of nationally elected and appointed prosecutors came together to talk about what role prosecutors can and should play. As a group, we wanted to respond immediately to the need for standards in how prosecutors perform our work around officer involved shootings. There remain many other areas to explore around the intersection of race, police use of force, and prosecutions. We will continue to meet and develop further guidance to our profession moving forward.

The APA established the Use of Force Project in 2016. The group reached out to experienced prosecuting attorneys, and other criminal and social justice professionals, from around the country to hold several summit meetings and to produce this project. The recommendations offer innovative and promising practices to investigating use of force incidents, ensuring the integrity of use of force prosecutions, and promoting equal justice and safer communities.

This fall the president of the country's largest police management organization acknowledged the feelings of mistrust in many communities and he apologized for past injustices. Chief Terrence M. Cummings stated that "[w]hile we obviously cannot change the past, it is clear that we must change the future...For our part, the first step is for law enforcement and the IACP to acknowledge and apologize for the actions of the past and the role that our profession has played in society's historical mistreatment of communities of color."

As prosecutors we have enforced many of these same laws in the courtroom. We must acknowledge that while our goal was public safety, the approach we have taken in the past has fallen more heavily on some communities. We played a part in the distrust that exists, and therefore, we share in the responsibility for curing that distrust. Most in our professions, policing and prosecution are striving to do the right thing. That is a good thing. That is a strong foundation on which to make improvements.

We spent the last year working together to find ways to change the status quo. This report is the culmination of that effort. It sets out important principles for the 21st century. Principles that prosecutors around the country should embrace. It also establishes a set of meaningful reforms prosecutors can implement to improve the investigation and charging decision process for officer involved shootings.

This is some of our most important work. When the police use lethal force on a member of our community, it must receive our most independent, thorough and professional evaluation. If prosecutors do the work independently, ethically and with transparency, it will go a long way to assure both law enforcement and the communities we represent that the law is followed faithfully, and is just and fair for all.



Signators

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