

CAAP

Colorado Association
of Addiction Professionals



June 7, 2020

Jared Polis
Governor
The State of Colorado

Adopting Empirically Supported Policies and Practices to Reduce Police Violence and Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System of State of Colorado

Dear Governor Polis,

The Board of Directors of the Colorado Association of Addiction Professionals (CAAP) joins you in condemning the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police officers. We struggle to deal with the pain and anger we are experiencing as witnesses to the senseless and horrific violence towards members of the Black and other marginalized communities in the United States. Addiction professionals across the state, while standing in support of the protests occurring across this nation, are horrified as police across have continued to use excessive force to disperse peaceful protesters and quell the violence that has erupted in response to the murder of Mr. Floyd and the excessive force being used against protesters. We are compelled to action.

As you know, addictions and other comorbid mental health disorders disproportionality affect People of Color and members of marginalized groups. Additionally, addiction is one of the many mental illnesses that increases an individual's likelihood of contact with the police, whether because the behaviors engaged in as part of having a substance use disorder are illegal or because they are health risk behaviors that often require the assistance of first responders. As such, CAAP is particularly gravely concerned about excessive use of force and police violence. Research shows that excessive use of force is pervasive in police departments across the United States (<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>). It also shows that the vast majority of police departments do not have policies banning chokeholds (<http://useofforceproject.org/#review>). Finally, this research has shown that the adoption of these 8 specific policies significantly reduces police violence:

- 1) Ban Carotid Restraints, including Chokeholds and Strangleholds
- 2) Require the Police to Engage in De-escalation
- 3) Require that the Police Issue a Warning Before Shooting
- 4) Require that the Police Exhaust All Alternatives Before Shooting
- 5) Duty to Intervene When a Police Officer Witnesses Use of Excessive Force
- 6) Ban Police Shooting at Moving Vehicles
- 7) Require the Police to Adopt a Use of Force Continuum
- 8) Require Comprehensive Reporting of Police Violence



Research shows a 72% decrease in police violence when all 8 policies are adopted. More information on these 8 policies can be found at [Scantwait.org](https://www.scantwait.org). It is time for action to make our state a safe place for everyone. Based on all of this information, the CAAP Board of Directors is requesting that you take the following action:

Mandate that all police units in the state of Colorado adopt all 8 of the policies that have been empirically shown to reduce police violence

We are aware of and in support of Senate Bill 217 recently introduced to reform police policies in the state of Colorado (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6936073-Police-accountability-bill.html>). However, we think that adopting all 8 policies will reduce police violence in Colorado beyond what is proposed in Senate Bill 217. It will also send the message that excessive use of force by the police against anyone in Colorado will not be tolerated. As part of adopting these policies, we also ask that the leadership of the state of Colorado commit to the vision of Campaign Zero (<https://www.joincampaignzero.org/#vision>): “We can live in a world where the police don’t kill people by limiting police interventions, improving community interactions, and ensuring accountability.”

Second, as noted above, individuals struggling with substance use disorders are more likely to come in contact with the justice system than others. Research shows that treating addiction as a chronic illness leads to better outcomes than treating addiction as felony criminal behavior (<https://www.cpr.org/2016/02/25/treating-addiction-as-a-chronic-disease/>), however, Colorado incarcerates more individuals with substance use disorders than some countries incarcerate their citizens for any reason (<https://www.coloradoindependent.com/2019/01/04/drug-sentencing-reforms-prison-population-opioids/>). Additionally, there are significant disparities in drug laws that disproportionately impact individuals struggling with substance use disorders who have marginalized identities compared to those who identify as White, heterosexual, and male especially for cannabis (<https://www.aclu.org/report/tale-two-countries-rationally-targeted-arrests-era-marijuana-reform>) and the different forms of cocaine (i.e., crack versus powder; <https://www.aclu.org/other/cracks-system-20-years-unjust-federal-crack-cocaine-law>). In fact, In Colorado the rates of incarceration of individuals who identify as Black, 18% of the incarcerated population compared to 4.6% of the state population, or American Indian, 4% of the incarcerated population compared to 1.6% of the state population, are so disparate when compared to individuals who identify as White, 44% of the incarcerated population compared to 87.1% of the state population (<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/CO.html>), that one can only conclude that Colorado’s system of justice is racist, biased towards incarcerating People of Color.

The Sentencing Project (<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-lives-matter-eliminating-racial-inequity-in-the-criminal-justice-system/>) recommends that the federal government and all states reform sentencing policy, address unjust racial disparities and practices, and implement alternatives to incarceration, such as treatment for individuals with



substance use or other mental health disorders. Research conducted by the Sentencing Project has uncovered best practices in the criminal justice system that address and reduce racial disparities in adjudication and sentencing. The 4 strategies that have shown to significantly reduce these biases are:

- 1) Revise Policies and Laws with Disparate Racial Impact
- 2) Address Implicit Racial Bias Among Criminal Justice Professionals
- 3) Reallocate Resources to Create a Fair Playing Field
- 4) Revise Policies that Exacerbate Socioeconomic Inequalities and Redirect Public Spending Toward Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment

States that have instituted some or all of these reforms have seen significant decreases in racial disparities in their criminal justice systems. Based on this information, the CAAP Board of Directors is requesting that you take the following action:

Adopt the Best Practices for Reducing Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System Throughout Colorado

By sending this Open Letter, the CAAP Board of Directors states that the time for action to stop police violence and racial disparities in the criminal justice system has long passed. We also state that it is never too late to start addressing these problems by implementing policies and practices that research indicates will directly result in change. We call on you to take the actions stipulated in this letter so that the state of Colorado can begin to change.

Sincerely,

The Board of Directors of the Colorado Association of Addiction Professionals

Signed: Agnieszka Baklazec, Bradley Conner, Jonathan DeCarlo, Mita Johnson, Tim Kitchens, Glory McDaniel, CJ Oliveira, Jennifer Place, Joyce Smith, Lawrence Wall Jr., and Thea Wessel