



OpEdNews.com

Exclusive to OpEd News:

OpEdNews Op Eds 7/29/2024 at 4:12 PM EDT

[Lawmakers must champion George Floyd Policing Act](#)

By *Ashleigh Fields* and *[Robert Weiner](#)*



Robert Weiner



Ashleigh Fields

Article first published in the *Minneapolis Spokesman-Recorder*

By Ashleigh Fields and Robert Weiner

Can you imagine gasping for your last breath of air, face to the pavement unjustly at the hands of the police? This is a painstaking reality for many black men. Daunte Wright, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, and George Floyd are just a few of the recognizable names out of the thousands killed at the hands of law enforcement each year.

Unfortunately, four years after Floyd's passing, the issue of police brutality still has a stronghold on our society.

"The time has come for the federal government to create structural change with meaningful reforms," Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX-18), who passed away this weekend, notably said after re-introducing the George Floyd Policing Act in the House earlier this year with 154 co-sponsors.

Leaders in the House and Senate floor must pick up the torch and uplift Jackson-Lee's legacy by ensuring this bill has the support it desperately needs to pass.

This week, during the Republican National Convention, Samuel Sharpe Jr. of Milwaukee was shot and killed by multiple out-of-town police officers because of an altercation involving a knife.

Weeks before the Convention, D'Vontaye Mitchell was murdered in cold blood on June 30 outside of the Milwaukee Hyatt Regency, where security guards pinned Mitchell to the ground.

Both families have been shattered since the incidents and are struggling to hold officers accountable for the loss of life. Our police need to be held accountable for perpetuating a cycle that upends lives.

The George Floyd Policing Act, which failed to pass in 2021, has a strong chance of changing what we now accept and expect as parts of commonplace American culture.

The bill, which would have established a federal registry of police misconduct, allows the Department of Justice to investigate police departments with a pattern of unfair practices and restrict qualified immunity for reckless disregard of the law. It was perhaps the most expansive piece of legislation with a strong potential for success.

"The only path toward preventing more black people from being killed by the very people who are sworn to protect them is to implement meaningful accountability, transparency, and reform of police practices

like what's included in the Justice in Policing Act. Anything short of that is a failure," Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), the Democrats' designated leader on the issue, wrote after the legislation passed in the House.

However, he and many others have been radio silent on efforts to enhance police accountability in such specific terms years after. The adjacent Justice for Breonna Taylor Act, which prevents no-knock warrants, is well-needed but speaks more to the issue of ownership and property rather than the blatant denial of human rights.

Bipartisan support from leaders like Tim Scott and Karen Bass are necessary to ensure the bill's refusal cannot rest dormant in the halls of Congress but rise as a precedent among the people of our nation.

"When you see trouble coming, and you say nothing and you do nothing, the blood is on your hands," Scott shared passionately on the floor in January of 2023.

Over the course of that year, police managed to kill the highest number of people on record, according to the Washington Post's reporting. Scott's statement is one that timelessly rings true.

As major cities like Baltimore, New York, and Atlanta look to build multi-million dollar military-style training facilities to practice how to shoot and use explosives, there must be regulations in place to combat the misuse of force.

Police-worn body cameras have been around for a little over a decade but haven't been integrated into every U.S. jurisdiction. In places that do utilize body cams, many have the authority to turn off recording warping footage to work in the favor of whatever narrative they chose to portray.

One example can be found in the death of Walter Scott, shot by Officer Michael Slager during a traffic stop. Slager lied in his radio call for backup, then murdered Scott and staged the scene, placing an unidentifiable black object next to Scott's dead body after handcuffing him. However, a bystander released footage that led to Slager's conviction.

Later on, South Carolina law enforcement released dash-cam footage but if not recorded in real time by an onlooker, one can only wonder how differently the story would have been told.

Scott's case is not unique. Instances of similar occurrences have been reported in cities across the country. And contrary to popular belief, it's not always in cases concerning a black man.

Half of the people shot and killed by police are white, according to a study conducted by the Washington Post. More than 50 percent of people shot and killed by police are between 20 and 40 years old, and 95% are male.

Right now, we need to follow a clear outline of how to build active and healthy relationships between law enforcement and community members. Departments should consider hiring officers through contracts that express the limited immunity opposed and monetary rewards for good behavior and developing long-lasting community partnerships/trust.

Reform cannot and will not happen on its own. Officers need to comply with training that's sensitive to the mentally ill and teaches how to combat implicit racial/socio-economic bias, while departments must engage in the study of successful accountability programs both nationally and internationally.

Robert Weiner served as a spokesman for the Clinton and George W. Bush Administrations. He was communications director of the House Government Operations and Judiciary Committees, and senior aide to Congressmen John Conyers and Charles Rangel, as well as Four-Star General/drug czar Barry McCaffrey, Reps. Claude Pepper, Ed Koch and Sen. Ted Kennedy.

Ashleigh Fields formerly served as editor-in-chief of The Hilltop at Howard University and Assistant Editor at The Afro-American. She is a policy analyst and research coordinator at Robert Weiner Associates News and Solutions For Change.