



Summer Stephan

San Diego County District Attorney

Hall of Justice

330 W. Broadway

San Diego, CA 92101

Dear DA Stephan,

We hope and pray this letter finds you doing well. I am reaching out to you in hopes of partnership with your office to work toward reasonable reforms to address more police accountability in the County of San Diego. I am certain you have heard about the killing of George Floyd of Minneapolis, MN. George Floyd should be alive today and I don't think anybody would disagree with that. The reality is that George Floyd's arrest that day should not have been a death sentence. Unfortunately, this is the daunting reality we are dealing with in America. The reality that when you are a person of color you could be easily mistaken for posing a threat to law enforcement and even in society. I am clear that protesting is positive and important, however, I think it's just as imperative to create real reforms within our systems and change laws that create stronger measures of accountability in our society and in our systems. The People's Alliance for Justice steps up to the plate every day for the voiceless of our society including those families impacted by the loss of their loved ones to police. I have been fighting for justice on behalf of families involved in these kinds of tragedies for years now. The one thing that matters to these families that I have heard when their loved one has been killed is the hope that the officers involved would be charged and arrested and at least investigated by fair and impartial prosecutors who their only motive is equal justice under the law.

San Diego County is not exempt from these realities I am discussing above. A matter of fact your office published a report in 2017 that outlined important disparities and improvement needed within our law enforcement agencies across the county. In the report your office

published it showed that almost 65% of San Diego police shootings happened less than five minutes after officers arrived on the scene, according to a new analysis of the 450 police shootings in San Diego County between 1993 and 2017. It was shared that you acknowledged that this number shows there is need for more officer training, especially on how to work with people on drugs or with mental health issues. These issues you discussed are real issues that need to be addressed however there are racial issues that need to be addressed. Nearly 19% of people shot by police in our county between 1993 and 2017 were black while blacks only make up nearly 5% of our county's population. It was also shared that you said that most of these police shootings in our county were ruled justified.

Moments like the one we are experiencing right now in America are rare. The movement toward police reform has never been stronger. There are fifty states marching and all races are uniting toward the call for police reform and accountability. That is why we are sharing this proposal with you and your staff to consider taking up quickly. The proposal we are making in this request is that the office of the San Diego County District Attorney would open up an independent unit to investigate police misconduct and excessive force cases in our county. We are making this recommendation to your office in light of many of the egregious police killings that have happened right here in our own backyard. The killings of Alfred Olango (2016), James Lacy (2017), and Jonathon Coronel (2017) are clear examples where officers overstepped their position of simply enforcing the law. These were African American and Latino men who were seen as threats at first sight. In these cases, and others, it would be good to see equal justice under the law taking place. Equal justice under the law would mean that there is an equal independent process of investigating misconduct among our police officers as we do citizens and there are no political strings attached. We are making the following recommendations below regarding what this unit could do:

- **The unit could provide an independent bilingual complaint hotline for citizens to place complaints separate from the local police agency or the County Law Enforcement Review Board (C.L.E.R.B.). This would be a hotline created through the unit and could also be placed on the District Attorney's website for people to place complaints of police misconduct online.**
- **The unit should be led by specially appointed prosecutors who would solely investigate police misconduct reported on the hotline and excessive force cases including police shootings in the County of San Diego.**
- **The unit should be an independent arm of the District Attorney's office and would be led by prosecutors who are capable of making full recommendations on cases of police misconduct, excessive force, or police shootings and even give final rulings on charges following the full review of cases.**
- **This unit could also review past convictions where defendants claimed innocence.**

In this moment for multiple reasons, we are asking you to do this. Creating this small step within your office would show the citizens of San Diego and particularly those of color that you are making an effort in this moment to expand on transparency and to address the deep systemic issues that plague communities of color when it comes to law enforcement. One of my favorite scriptures I am sharing with you: “Learn to do good; seek **justice**, correct oppression; bring **justice** to the fatherless, and please the widow's cause,” (Isaiah 1:17). Dr. Martin Luther King once said “the time is always right to do what is right”.

We are asking that you take on action on this proposal and recommendation immediately as the moment is here and the time is right. Thank you, District Attorney Stephan, for your consideration of this proposal. The People’s Alliance for Justice is a national civil rights organization founded to keep Dr. Martin Luther King’s dream alive by taking direct action for all with a balanced standard of justice. We can be reached via phone at 619-354-8051 or by email at [paj@peoplesallianceforjustice.net](mailto:paj@peoplesallianceforjustice.net) .

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Harris', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Shane Harris

President & Founder, People’s Alliance for Justice