



*“One Nation Working Together,  
For Justice and Equality  
Everywhere”*

**NAACP, Berkshire County Branch  
Officers:**

**Dennis Powell**, President

**Leah Reed**, Vice President

**Chad Robertson**, First Secretary

**Erica Mielke**, Treasurer

Members at Large  
**Shirley Edgerton**  
**Jerome Edgerton**  
**Alfred (A.J.) Enchill**  
**Ari Zorn**

**Standing Committees:**

**Leah Reed**  
Social Media

**Dubois Thomas**  
Community Coordination

**Brooke Bridges**  
Health

**Chad Robertson**  
Membership & Life Membership

**John Lewis**  
Economic Development/Justice

**Al Blake, Raei Bridges**  
Environmental & Climate Justice

**Rebecca Thompson**  
Website

**Shirley Edgerton & Joel Priest**  
Race Relations

**Christina Diagnault**  
Legal Redress

NAACP, Berkshire County Branch  
P.O. Box 605  
Pittsfield, MA 01202-0605  
Phone: (413) 464-7898  
Email Address  
[naacpberkshirecounty@gmail.com](mailto:naacpberkshirecounty@gmail.com)  
Web-Site  
[www.naacpberkshires.org](http://www.naacpberkshires.org)

## Ending Police Violence: Demanding Both Accountability and Justice

For the past month, the people of Berkshire County gathered in unprecedented numbers to protest the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and police violence against Black people across this nation. In Pittsfield, North Adams, Williamstown, and Great Barrington, hundreds of us stood, knelt, chanted, and marched to bring an end to the racism embedded in policing in America. Many more passed by in cars and honked in support of the cause. This is heartening and exhilarating. Street protest is essential. And now is time to focus on the next steps for change.

We in the Berkshire County Branch of the NAACP feel that there are two general approaches for reducing police violence: **Accountability** and **Justice**. The accountability approach focuses on the individual police officers which bring shame upon police departments and outrage from citizens. Derek Chavin, the officer who pinned his knee on George Floyd's neck for nine minutes, is Exhibit A of this sort of abuse. The justice approach, by contrast, holds that the long and tragic history of institutional racism in America has created and reinforced a system of policing that is still directed at the unfair control of Black and Brown people, rather than directed at protecting and serving all people equally. Black people are being killed at egregiously disproportionate rates compared to White people. These killings were not necessarily done because the police involved were prejudiced against Black people, but because American policing itself evolved as a means of controlling African Americans. The system is working as perfectly as it was designed.

Given both these two schools of thought, we want to put forward changes to American policing that fall under each. Ultimately, we believe both types of change are needed: we must hold abusive cops accountable for their actions, whether minor or lethal. And we must also adopt the justice-oriented recommendations that will transform policing as a force for liberty and justice for all.

### Improving the Accountability of Police

1. Establish Clear Use of Force Guidelines to protect human life and rights.

In this absence, state and local jurisdictions must adopt policies that do the following: ban knee and choke holds, end no-knock raids, systemize a safe use of force continuum with clear rules on escalation, and revise the use of force standards from *reasonable*, which is nebulous, to *necessary*.

2. Require Independent Investigation and Prosecution when police kill or seriously injure people.

We must create independent prosecutors' offices whose only mandate would be to investigate and prosecute all alleged acts by officers involving excessive use of force, whether or not they resulted in fatalities. These units must prevent advocates for the police from being involved in prosecuting the police.

3. Implement Community Review Boards with investigative and subpoena powers.

When police hold so much power over the well-being of citizens, there must exist civilian oversight to protect people from misconduct, malfeasance, and overreach. These entities must create and publicize easily accessible methods for civilians to submit, view and discuss complaints.

4. Provide Access and Transparency for all data involving police records.

Each State's Open Records Act must ensure officer misconduct information and disciplinary histories are not shielded from the public. Video evidence, whether from dash or body cams, should be archived in searchable, accessible public databases.



*“One Nation Working Together,  
For Justice and Equality  
Everywhere”*

**NAACP, Berkshire County Branch  
Officers:**

**Dennis Powell**, President

**Leah Reed**, Vice President

**Chad Robertson**, First Secretary

**Erica Mielke**, Treasurer

Members at Large

**Shirley Edgerton**

**Jerome Edgerton**

**Alfred (A.J.) Enchill**

**Ari Zorn**

**Standing Committees:**

**Leah Reed**

Social Media

**Dubois Thomas**

Community Coordination

**Brooke Bridges**

Health

**Chad Robertson**

Membership & Life Membership

**John Lewis**

Economic Development/Justice

**Al Blake, Raci Bridges**

Environmental & Climate Justice

**Rebecca Thompson**

Website

**Shirley Edgerton & Joel Priest**

Race Relations

**Christina Diagnault**

Legal Redress

NAACP, Berkshire County Branch

P.O. Box 605

Pittsfield, MA 01202-0605

Phone: (413) 464-7898

Email Address

[naacpberkshirecounty@gmail.com](mailto:naacpberkshirecounty@gmail.com)

Web-Site

[www.naacpberkshires.org](http://www.naacpberkshires.org)

5. Ban unfair protections for officers in police union contracts.

In some ways, the most pernicious force of resistance against accountability are the police unions. Strong unions should fight tooth and nail for their members' wages, benefits, and work conditions. But unions fail the public at large when they create barriers to effective oversight of misconduct.

**Transforming Policing into a Force for Justice**

6. Reinvest in Community Functions that are now done by police.

Police officers should continue to fight crime. But we must redirect funds in our communities to enable those professionals who are trained to tackle specific “societal failures” to do so: school counselors, family crisis case-workers, mental health professionals, and drug counselors.

7. End “Broken Windows” Policing.

We must abandon quota-driven policing and stop unnecessary prosecution of low-level offenses. This racially discriminatory practice targets low-income People of Color for engaging in minor acts of civil disorder that have been virtually decriminalized in well-off white communities.

8. Train Police who are “Guardians, Not Warriors” via Bias Training and Demilitarization.

Police training must put a greater emphasis on working within the diverse communities they serve, especially bias training and cultural competency. We must also end the transfer of military grade weaponry (i.e. armored vehicles, grenade launchers, etc.) from the Department of Defense to local police.

9. End the Profit Motive in Policing.

We need to ban municipalities from generating more than 10% of total revenue from fines and fees, base those fines and fees on a sliding scale tied to income, and end the multiplying effect of late penalties, suspended licenses and bench warrants.

10. Reverse the Forty-Year Trend of Incarceration.

The age of mass incarceration must be brought to an end, including reforms in pre-trial procedures, sentencing, parole review, probation violations, expungement, and a removal of legal barriers that prevent re-entering citizens from getting housing, social services, education and jobs.

This is our moment to demand significant and lasting change, not just modest reforms around the edges of policing institutions. We must begin the unglamorous but righteous work of pushing all our elected officials to embrace and fight for these ten action steps, in whatever domain they lead, whether municipal, state or national.

At the same time, we in the NAACP also want to invite all people in Berkshire County, whether you've recently joined the NAACP and or haven't yet done so, to keep working to build your understanding about how systemic racism helped create American criminal justice. We are a proudly multiracial and multiethnic organization. Our mission is not about fostering White Guilt. Guilt has no lasting value in this movement. This is about all Americans taking responsibility in order to create a more perfect union.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee of the Berkshire County Branch of the NAACP