

# San Diego Black Agenda Project

*Collective Impact for the Greater Good*

August 5, 2015

Council President Sherri Lightner, Chair  
Councilmember Chris Cate, Vice Chair  
Councilmember Marti Emerald  
Councilmember Mark Kersey

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## **RE: Call to the Strengthen Citizens Review Board**

Dear Council President Lightner and Councilmembers Cate, Emerald, and Kersey:

The San Diego Black Agenda Project is a collective of African and African-American organizations working in collaboration to improve the lives of Black San Diegans in the areas of health, housing, education, employment, and criminal justice. In keeping with that mission, we share the concerns of many other San Diego organizations regarding the need for a strong Citizens Review Board.

As evidenced by recent reports of million-dollar settlements paid by San Diego taxpayers, the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) has a history of abuse of power and violence against people of color, women, immigrants, the LGBTQ community, and activists. All San Diegans have the right to feel safe, to be safe, and to be treated respectfully by law enforcement.

Abuse of power by SDPD takes many forms, from disproportionate traffic and pedestrian stops, citations, questioning, searches and seizures, sexual harassment, physical abuse, wrongful arrest to police shootings. More than 200 cases of individuals killed by law enforcement have been documented. Rarely are the lives or names publicized. The tools to hold SDPD accountable are not working. We suffer from a crisis of trust.

The San Diego Black Agenda Project has endorsed a call to reform the Citizens Review Board on Police Practices (CRB). We call on the Charter Review Committee to reference the model of the San Diego County Law Enforcement Review Board, empowered by the voters in 1990 by passing Proposition A. (<http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/clerb/brochure09.pdf>)

City Charter reforms essential to the effective functioning of civilian and community oversight of the SDPD include:

1. Independent investigators and subpoena power, as provided to the San Diego County Law Enforcement Review Board by the voters in 1990 (Proposition A); and
2. Intake, tracking, and review of all complaints conducted by the CRB rather than by SDPD Internal Affairs, also as modeled by the San Diego County Law Enforcement Review Board approved by the voters in 1990.

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The only thing about the San Diego County Law Enforcement Review Board that the City of San Diego should NOT emulate is failure to provide adequate funding and staffing to carry out the voters' will and to provide cost-effective, independent review of San Diego's police.

We additionally recommend that the Charter Review Committee make two further revisions to the City Charter to reinforce the community-based nature of independent police oversight:

1. Change the name from "Citizens Review Board" to "Community Review Board," because not all stakeholders in our community are U.S. citizens; and
2. Have the Members of this Community Review Board on Police Practices appointed by the representatives elected by the 9 City Council Districts – 2 per District, plus 1 appointed by the Mayor.

Please know that we can truly live up to the name "America's Finest City" only if all of us, including elected and appointed officials and police officers, acknowledge, value, and respect all of our residents.

Thank you for your service to the City of San Diego.

Warmest regards,

*Felicia Yearwood*

Felicia Yearwood,  
Steering Committee Representative