

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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Opening Statement

Rep. Ayanna Pressley

Full Committee Briefing

“Voices from the Front: An Overdue Reckoning with Structural Racism in Policing” June 19, 2020

Black America is in the midst of a crisis, within a crisis, within a crisis.

A public health pandemic that has robbed us of more than 115,000 lives across our nation--disproportionately Black lives--unveiling and reiterating the stark systemic inequities and disparities in our healthcare system.

An economic crisis that has led to mass unemployment, evictions and record levels of food insecurity.

And the crisis of systemic racism in our policing system--a system rooted in this nation's original sin of bondage and slavery. A system that for too long has perpetuated the criminalization, the profiling and surveillance of black and brown bodies, and resulted in the lynching and murder of countless Black people.

And while the COVID-19 pandemic took this nation by storm, the only thing COVID-19 didn't disrupt was racism.

So, in this moment of truth telling, in this moment of reckoning, it is critical that we center the humanity and dignity of all people and ensure those closest to the pain are driving and informing the policy making.

As Baldwin reminds us, “Not all things that are faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

The fact of the matter is, racism is not simply a point of view. It is not a point of view or the actions of a few bad apples. It is as structural as the marble pillars of this institution.

The man-made discriminatory policies that have destroyed Black lives and Black families in this country were very precise. From the original sin of bondage to redlining to the failed war on drugs.

So in this moment, we need our policy solutions to be just as specific and precise in legislating our healing and justice.

The culmination of generations of hurt and trauma have led us to this moment.

It is not enough to say Black Lives Matter. Our policies and our budgets must value Black Lives.

We must heed the calls of community and push forward policies that will provide much-needed accountability and structural change.

Righteous rage and the pursuit of justice has driven thousands to the streets in every state across our country.

But let me be clear, there can be no justice for Oscar Grant, for Eric Garner, Michael Brown or Tony McDade.

There can be no justice for Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, for Layleen Polanco, Natasha McKenna, Mya Hall or Janisha Fonville.

There can be no justice for Rayshard Brooks, Stephon Clark, for Freddie Gray or Terrance Coleman.

For in a truly just world, they would all still be with us.

There however must be accountability.

This is personal. I am a Congresswoman. But first and foremost, I am a Black Woman. Married to a Black man. Raising a Black child.

Today is Juneteenth. And Black folks still have yet to experience our full freedoms or true emancipation and liberation. Because that freedom really begins with a freedom from fear.

I would like very much to pass along to our daughter, who will soon be 12, generational wisdom, wealth, joy—instead of generational fear and trauma. She already knows the unbearable pain of fearing for her life, or her father's life, and for those she loves, whenever we're out of her sight.

I know what it is to be surveyed, profiled, and threatened. And still, we rise.

Generations from now our grandchildren will look back and ask a simple question, when you had the opportunity to legislate with conviction, to summon the political courage, to

ensure that not another man is lynched in broad daylight, that not another woman is murdered in her own home. Did you?

So I thank our witnesses for joining us today. For lifting their voices. For holding us accountable and for fighting to ensure that their loved ones' deaths were not in vain.

Thank you, and I yield.

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