



City of Austin

Leslie Pool, Council Member District 7

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Council Member Leslie Pool Statement on Black Lives Matter protests in Austin June 1, 2020

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Like many here in Austin, I spent this last weekend consumed by the protests in our downtown and across the country, where outrage and frustration unfolded in many cities across several days and nights.

We are besieged on three fronts – by a President who tries to debase our nation with divisive and demeaning rhetoric; by a pandemic that has wrenched and disrupted all of us over several months with no sure resolution in sight; and now, once again, by the violent, senseless death of a black man at police hands.

My heart hurts from the events that we've seen, from the deaths of these men and so many others, but we know what must be done: we must stop the killing.

We must grasp this moment and do what must be done to effect true criminal justice and police reform. This weekend was a test of our police department, but also of the institutions that underlie our justice system – our health, education, employment, and political systems. Most will come up failing.

We have tools at our fingertips from the Task Force on 21st Century Policing, formed by the Obama administration. Their report and toolkit for a “New Era of Public Safety” is a useful strategy for equitable and safe community policing for our city. I recognize that community policing is only one aspect of the critical police reform we need. It strikes me that only very recently, we received an audit of APD's Community Policing program which indicated that there remains a disconnect between where we want to be with that program, and where our police officers actually are. Many communities feel they are simply being policed, not protected. It's time we recognize that deep relationships that foster trust are the foundation of police reform.

We need to decide what kind of community we want to be, and lead by example not only on criminal justice, but in all of our systems that determine outcomes for our families and influence their ability to thrive in our city. We must show justice is being served in Austin, that our city is fair and equitable, compassionate and evenhanded. That we are just.

Our police department needs to be a partner in this journey. I think of the police chiefs who marched with the protestors this weekend, and who stood up before the crowds and named all of those who had been killed at the hands of law enforcement. That is the kind of commitment to the community this city needs from our police department. We need to know that they stand with us.

We are all in this together, and we are stronger together.

Never again another Michael Ramos tragedy. Never again the injustices done to Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. Never again another George Floyd murder. In Austin, we must have zero tolerance for killing and injustice of any kind.

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