



April 7, 2021

Chair Carlos Mariani  
House Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

**RE: Support for the Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Omnibus Bill**

Chair Mariani and Members,

CMAH's primary role as a state agency is to inform elected officials about the experiences, needs, and perspectives of African Heritage Minnesotans. Our community has long-standing experience with the ways that racial disadvantages in the criminal justice system harm civil liberty and public safety. The national and global responses to the killing of George Floyd have increased public awareness of this issue and motivated a widespread desire for systemic change through commonsense reforms.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to your Committee for responding to this public need for change by including proposals in the omnibus that are bound to improve equity and public safety. We would also like to recommend additional steps that would strengthen the proposals further.

We thank the committee for including funding and policy support on the following:

1. Clean Slate Act, which provides an automatic expungement for certain offenses
2. Minnesota Heals Initiative, which provides grants to community healing networks, support for families after officer-involved incidents, and a statewide critical incident stress management office
3. Survivor Support and Prevention Grants Program, which provides funds and services directly to victim survivors of crime
4. Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women, which will study the systemic causes of violence against African American women and girls, policies and institutions that impact such violence, and strategies for reducing such violence and helping victims.

We also thank you for inclusion of the following policy reforms in Article 2 of the omnibus:

1. Requirement that chief law enforcement officers share, in real time, certain private peace officer data with the POST Board. This data collection will help improve peace officer training and assist the POST Board and its Advisory Council with fulfilling their duties
2. Important and reasonable limits on use of no-knock search warrants by law enforcement, including prohibition of the use of no-knock warrants when the underlying crime is drug possession or if the subject of the warrant has a known disability

3. Expansion of the definition of bias crimes to include gender bias and bias against a person who associates with someone in a protected group. This inclusive proposal would improve peace officer reporting and training related to bias crimes
4. Improved regulations of peace officer body camera recordings of use of deadly force incidents
5. Requirement that POST Board change the peace officer code of conduct to prohibit white supremacist affiliation or support.

Finally, we want to thank the Committee for the following provisions and ask that you take further actions to strengthen these important proposals:

**Public Assembly Response** - We are happy to see that the omnibus bill requires that POST Board develop a model policy on public assembly response and for law enforcement agencies to adopt a public assembly response policy based on the model policy. Establishing a minimum First Amendment standard for law enforcement response to public assembly would aid peace officer-community relations and protect civil liberty and public safety. However, the omnibus does not include the critical accountability component of this measure, which would subject a peace officer who violates the public assembly response policy to disciplinary action, including loss of the officer's license to serve. Please incorporate this important accountability component as a critical step toward improving relations between peace officers and the communities they serve.

**Citizen Oversight Councils** - The omnibus includes a proposal that allows local units of government to establish citizen oversight councils. The omnibus removes the prohibition on the establishment of such oversight bodies. We urge your Committee to strengthen this proposal by requiring that local governments establish civilian oversight councils and providing the necessary funding and policy support to ensure that such oversight bodies are inclusive and reflective of the diverse communities they serve.

There is increased sensitivity to the ways that racial bias in policing harms its victims directly and the general public indirectly. The public is also much more aware that these are matters of life and death for the African Heritage Community. What's needed at this juncture is that we come together, move beyond the biases of partial interests, and put measures in place that improve peace officer standards of conduct and accountability for those improved standards. We applaud the steps that your Committee has taken in this direction, and we thank you for seeking investments and policies that promote community-driven public safety practices of healing, inclusion, and nonviolence. Thanks for your leadership in this work. Please prioritize your proposals and the above recommendations in conference committee negotiations.

Sincerely,

Linda Sloan  
Executive Director  
Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage