



June 18, 2020

Joyce E. McConnell J.D., LL.M.
President
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado

A Call to Adopt Best Practices in Policing to Protect the Colorado State University Community

Dear President McConnell,

We join you in condemning the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police officers and the police and non-police killings of many other members of the Black community in the United States (<https://president.colostate.edu/speeches-and-writing/csu-condemns-floyd-killing-stands-with-community-against-hate-and-violence/>). We also acknowledge and support the statement issued by the Colorado State University Police Department (CSUPD) regarding George Floyd's murder (<https://police.colostate.edu/csupd-response-to-death-of-george-floyd/>). We are all struggling, dealing with pain and anger we experience as witnesses to the senseless and horrific violence towards members of the Black and other marginalized communities in the United States. The pain we experience is amplified by witnessing police across this country continue the use of excessive force in an effort to disperse peaceful protesters and to quell the violence that has erupted in response to the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the countless other victims of police violence, including the victims of the excessive force used against protesters. We are appalled. Silence is not an option. We are compelled to action.

We value social justice as much as we value science. As such, we seek research to help us determine our course of action. Research shows that excessive use of force is pervasive in police departments across the United States (<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>). For instance, the vast majority of police departments do not have policies banning the use of carotid restraints, such as chokeholds and body restraints that restrict the flow of air (<http://useofforceproject.org/#review>). We acknowledge that there are currently two positions regarding how to move forward, one aimed at police reform, and one, more transformational, aimed at police abolition and transforming the way we exist as citizens of a common community. As such, we are writing to you, President McConnell, with specific requests on how to reform current CSUPD practices and how to transform the community we all share.

In terms of reforming current CSUPD policy, research has shown that adoption of 8 specific policies may significantly reduce police violence by as much as a 72% when all 8 policies are adopted (<https://8cantwait.org/>). The 8 policies empirically shown to reduce police violence are:

- 1) Ban Carotid Restraints, including Chokeholds and Strangleholds
- 2) Require the Police to Engage in De-escalation
- 3) Require that the Police Issue a Warning Before Shooting
- 4) Require that the Police Exhaust All Alternatives Before Shooting
- 5) Duty to Intervene When a Police Officer Witnesses Use of Excessive Force
- 6) Ban Police Shooting at Moving Vehicles
- 7) Require the Police to Adopt a Use of Force Continuum
- 8) Require Comprehensive Reporting of Police Violence



We attempted to find the CSUPD Use of Force Policy on the internet, including in the CSU Policy Library (<http://policylibrary.colostate.edu/>) to determine how many of the 8 policies our police force has implemented but could not locate the policy. In addition, we have been in communication with CSUPD and they have confirmed that there is a Use of Force Policy that they follow, but that that document is not publicly available. Without that information publicly available, we are unsure if our police department is following best practices regarding police use of force. As such, we are requesting that you, as the President of Colorado State University, do the following:

1) Make public the Colorado State University Police Department Use of Force Policy

Making this information publicly available allows our community to understand how CSUPD approaches the use of force and how they are held accountable for excessive use of force. Accountability for violations of Use of Force policies have been shown to be effective at reducing police violence. We do want to note that, as far as we know, there is very little evidence of CSUPD engaging in use of excessive force against members of the CSU community. However, we think that transparency is important at all levels across the university, including at the CSUPD. Additionally, given that we do not know which, if any, of the 8 policies are currently implemented at CSUPD, we request that you:

2) Mandate that the Colorado State University Police Department adopt all 8 of the policies that have been empirically shown to reduce police violence

We think that the adoption of these policies will help ensure that police violence continues to occur infrequently on our campus and that when it does occur, there is transparency and there are sanctions in place to ensure justice for everyone involved in the incident. It will also send a message that excessive use of force against anyone will not be tolerated on the CSU Campus.

Additionally, we understand that every time there is an emergency and we call 911 for assistance, we do not always need a police officer to respond. However, the current emergency response model is non-specific, when someone on campus calls 911 there is no way to specify what emergency services are needed. Additionally, as far as we know, CSU does not employ emergency mental health services respondents (i.e., psychologists, social workers, psychiatric personnel). This is problematic, as sending police to respond to mental health emergencies can exacerbate, rather than address, the emergent situations. In fact, research shows that 20-50% of lethal use of force incidents by the police resulting in death involve someone with a mental illness ([https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(16\)30384-1/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(16)30384-1/fulltext)). There are at least two models already in place in communities to address this issue, one in Eugene, Oregon, Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS; <https://whitebirdclinic.org/>) and the Denver Alliance for Street Health Response (DASHR; <https://dashrco.org/>). Research has shown that in Eugene less than 1% of the calls to 911 require an armed police response. Given this, we request that you:

3) Mandate that the CSU adopt a mobile crisis response team who respond to 911 calls that includes fire, paramedic, mental health mobile response, and, when necessary, police

To this end, we acknowledge that the CSU community already has the resources needed for this reform in the training programs that exist on campus, including the Health Network, the Ph.D. Counseling



Psychology and the Masters in Addiction Counseling Programs in the Psychology Department, the Masters in Social Work Program in the School of Social Work, the Professional Counseling Program in the Department of Education, and the Marriage and Family Therapy Program in Human Development and Family Studies, among others. This point is made as we are requesting that you:

4) Mandate that these reforms are put in place without increasing the CSUPD annual budget

While we all agree that standing with survivors and acknowledging the victims of police violence is important and that condemning excessive use of force is also important, acknowledging and condemning are simply not enough. Thus, in addition to these specific reforms we are requesting, we also seek transformative changes to ensure that our campus is a safe place for everyone. One of these transformative changes is to determine, through research and dialogue, how the CSU community can transform to serve everyone. This dialogue should be informed by the members of the community most affected by the imbalances in our current system and should be guided the 8 principles of abolition (<https://www.8toabolition.com/>) that are steeped in the principles of transformation. As such, we request that you:

5) Mandate the creation of a committee of stakeholders intent on transforming the CSU community by addressing mental health needs, food insecurity, housing insecurity, and the other structural and social determinants of health that lead to significant health disparities for those who identify as members of minority and marginalized groups

Finally, given that our community is nested within the city of Fort Collins, it is important to us to address the possibility of police violence against members of our community at all levels. It was not long ago that video surfaced of the Fort Collins police using excessive force against one of our own students, Michaella Surat. Additionally, there are multiple instances of documented excessive force complaints against the Fort Collins Police (<https://www.9news.com/article/news/local/fort-collins-settles-police-brutality-lawsuits/73-5c4e2004-247f-4589-a9c4-470b80f2c718>). We understand that members of our community live in Fort Collins and that CSU relies on and are thus subject to the policies of the Fort Collins police, including their Use of Force policy. As such, we request that you:

6) Write an open letter on behalf of Colorado State University to the Fort Collins Police Department and the Mayor of Fort Collins requesting that the City also adopt the 8 Can't Wait reform policies and create a mobile crisis response team to end police violence

By sending this Open Letter to you, we state that the time for action to end police violence is long overdue. We state that it is time to implement reform and transformation on the CSU Campus. We call on you to take the actions stipulated in this letter so that CSU and the surrounding city of Fort Collins are safer for everyone. As a final request, we ask you and the broader University Community to commit to the vision of Campaign Zero (<https://www.joincampaignzero.org/#vision>): “We can live in a world where the police don't kill people by limiting police interventions, improving community interactions, and ensuring accountability.”

(If you would like your name added to the letter, please email Brad Conner at brad.conner@colostate.edu)

This Letter is Supported by the Undersigned:



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