



Urban League of  
Greater Kansas City



NAACP  
Kansas City, Missouri Branch



## A Joint Statement Calling for Reform in the Kansas City Police Department

In the wake of recent homicides of African American men and excessive force at the hands of police in Kansas City, Chief Smith's abuse of power, and the Board of Police Commissioners' complicity in obstructing justice, the time has come for sweeping structural reforms within the Kansas City Police Department. Chief Smith should resign from his position and the City of Kansas City should pursue local control of the police department with all deliberate speed.

We arrived at this conclusion based on several months of fact finding. Since November 2019, our Civil Rights organizations, in collaboration with faith and community leaders, have become increasingly appalled and very much concerned about Chief Smith's questionable leadership of the Kansas City Police Department, and the Board of Police Commissioner's laissez-faire form of governance, which in effect, allows Chief Smith to act unilaterally as the supreme investigator, judge and jury in excessive force and officer-involved homicide cases in his department.

The ongoing policies, practices, and procedures of the KCPD foster distrust in law enforcement. When individuals and communities do not trust law enforcement, it becomes increasingly more difficult to reduce crime.

After seven months of conducting our due diligence, we have arrived at the conclusion that a change in leadership at KCPD and a return to local control of the police department is required for the following reasons:

1. Chief Smith's blatant refusal to issue standard probable cause statements in excessive force and homicide cases involving police officers under his command. This tactic obstructs justice and erodes public trust. We expect the police department to issue Probable Cause Statements when requested and in alignment with standard operating procedures in ALL cases.
2. Chief Smith's consistent incestuous practice of conducting internal investigations of officer-involved homicides and excessive force incidents rather than calling for an outside law enforcement agency to conduct independent investigations as is a common best practice utilized by most law enforcement agencies. This practice raises concerns about cronyism and cover-ups. We expect the Kansas City Police Department to engage an outside law enforcement agency to conduct independent investigations into officer-involved use of force cases.
3. Chief Smith's decision to appoint the former supervisor of one of the detectives involved in the December 2019 homicide of an African American male as the lead investigator and the withholding of this information from prosecutors. This practice compromises the integrity of the investigative process and undermines the prosecutors' ability to do their job. We expect that no officer should ever be allowed to investigate a fellow officer in cases involving excessive force. Moreover, we expect that a citizen's review panel should be convened to investigate community complaints.
4. Chief Smith's consistent practice of reinstating officers to active duty while investigations into their roles in excessive-force and homicide cases are ongoing. Exerting his authority in this manner can be perceived by many as a declaration of innocence or the absence of guilt before the conclusion of the investigation. We expect officers to remain on leave until an independent investigation has been completed and a probable cause statement has been issued.
5. Chief Smith's decision to conduct a vacuous investigation on the victim in a recent officer-involved homicide prior to conducting the investigation into the homicide case. This was a waste of time and resources. Obviously, a dead man cannot be prosecuted. Moreover, it begs the question, why? Why did he feel it was necessary to spend weeks investigating the man his officers killed rather than the tactics, procedures and circumstances prevalent in the homicide? It is indicative of a desire to protect his officers as opposed to seeking justice and protecting the rule of law. We expect victims to be treated as victims, not perpetrators.

6. The Board of Police Commissioners behaves as if they were appointed by the Governor to protect and serve the police chief and police officers rather than to ensure that the department is committed to fair and impartial public safety strategies, dedicated to the principles of fairness, equity and accountability and working actively to build bridges that lead to substantial change. Approximately 70% of the City's operating budget is allocated to public safety with over \$250 million dedicated to the police department, yet the City of KCMO has no authority over KCPD decisions, policies, practices, and procedures. Kansas City is the only city in the nation that does not have local control of its police department. We expect to have a voice in the public institutions that are funded with tax dollars. We support local control.

Research has proven that African Americans are more likely to lack trust in law enforcement due to historical and present-day excessive force and homicide incidents perpetrated against blacks. We believe that a lack of trust in KCPD is partially attributable to the department's inability to solve crimes and reduce violence in addition to the absence of transparency in the investigation of citizen complaints and the department's two-tiered system of justice that treats officers differently and shields them from accountability.

When people don't trust the criminal justice system, they are less likely to rely on the law to solve conflicts, which might make them more likely to try to solve conflicts on their own, resulting in violent resolutions.

Recent news reports detailing police-board-approved, multimillion-dollar out-of-court settlements for police involved shootings, homicides, and excessive force incidents along with the recent uptick in police involved shootings and homicides of African American men have heightened the level of our distrust in Chief Smith. We have no confidence in his ability to lead this department in a manner that respects and values the humanity of all Kansas Citians, irrespective of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

Nor do we have confidence in Smith's willingness to embrace and institute the progressive reforms that are necessary to lead to transparency, civility, quicker resolutions of crimes, mutual accountability, and fair and impartial public safety strategies.

It is imperative that progressive structural reforms grounded in advancing the principles of Procedural Justice, which include: 1) being fair in processes; 2) being transparent in actions; 3) providing opportunity for voice; and 4) being impartial in decision-making. To get this done, we need local control and new leadership.

MORE2  
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