

## **NLG Resolution Supporting the Abolition of Policing**

We define "policing" as both "**a social relationship made up of a set of practices that are empowered by the state to enforce law and maintain social control and cultural hegemony through the use of force**" or other violence or coercion (Critical Resistance), *and* the insidious logic and practice of surveillance, punishment, disposability, and isolation perpetrated on ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized levels. "Police" include all municipal, county, state, and federal police agencies, plus all private police or security forces, and neighborhood watch or vigilante militias. Any institution or individual can engage in policing.

Whereas, the murder of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, by Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020, sparked the Minneapolis Uprising, and subsequent uprisings in cities across the U.S. against ubiquitous anti-Black police violence, including the murder of Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman, by Louisville police on March 13; and

Whereas, the National Lawyers Guild is an organization committed to Movement Lawyering, with the belief that human life is more sacred than property interests, and has been providing ongoing legal support to the uprisings and protests against police violence, and for the self-determination of all Black people; and

Whereas, the prominent calls coming out of these protests and ongoing movement organizing are to defund, disband, and completely abolish the police; and

Whereas, the police are the front lines of state repression of revolutionary social movements, engaging in surveillance, harassment, beatings, raids, arrests, and murders of organizers and activists with the intent to stifle and quash revolutionary social movements--especially those organizing for Black liberation;

Whereas, U.S. police forces began as slave patrols, protecting the property rights (i.e. legal dominion over Black bodies) of white enslavers, starting with South Carolina in 1690, and then were used to enforce the Black Codes, as well as repress labor movements, and have since always used violence to enforce the "law and order" defined by anti-Blackness, white supremacy, racial capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, colonialism, and imperialism; and

Whereas, police forces always have and always will be a tool of colonialism and white supremacy, with a fundamental role of enforcing "the rule of the politically powerful and the economic elite: this is why poor and working class [Black & brown] communities are so heavily policed... The police reflect and reinforce the dominant ideology of the state that employs them, which also explains why they are inherently racist, and resistant to substantive reform. In other words, if the task of the police is to maintain law and order, then that role takes on a specific meaning in a fundamentally racist society. Policing has changed over time as the nature and needs of the American state have changed, but it has also remained incredibly consistent as a thoroughly racist institution trained on Black communities" (Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor); and

Whereas, Black people are specifically targeted for policing, and white people have used the police to enforce white supremacist social order, including calling the police on Black people for any number of mundane daily activities, such as, walking, jogging, napping, barbecuing--both in public space and Black people's own homes; and

Whereas, police forces serve as the entry point into the prison industrial complex, taking people to jail, and where they ultimately end up in prison or under another form of correctional surveillance and control; and

Whereas, in 2015, the National Lawyers Guild passed a resolution supporting the abolition of prisons, including jails and any other institution where people are held against their will through coercion, force, or threat of force, such as police lockups; juvenile detention facilities; immigration detention facilities; and hospitals or nursing homes where people are held against their will for civil commitment, psychiatric treatment, or quarantine; and

Whereas, police violence is among the leading causes of death for young Black and brown men, and all Black people, including Black trans and cis women, girls, and nonbinary folks, queer folks, disabled people, Indigenous people, immigrants, and brown Latinx folks killed by police at disproportionately higher rates than their white peers; and

Whereas, on June 10th, 2020, the National Lawyers Guild released a press release in support of [#8toAbolition](#), a platform specifically pushing back on the liberal police reforms put forth in the [8 Can't Wait campaign](#), which offers a set of eight reforms they claim would reduce police killings by 72%, as if any amount of people being murdered by the police or subject to non-lethal police violence is acceptable; and

Whereas, in 2018, the National Lawyers Guild passed a resolution condemning SESTA-FOSTA, and adopted "a position for the full decriminalization of sex workers, their clients, and related third-parties, and demands an immediate end to the policing of communities profiled as sex workers and all sex work criminalization laws and practices," and sex workers are still heavily policed, sexually assaulted by police, and police enforce sex work criminalization by targeting and arresting sex workers; and

Whereas, in 2019, the National Lawyers Guild passed a resolution supporting "the call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions *of all institutions whose conduct is complicit in the occupation of Palestine or complicit in any denial of Palestinian human rights,*" and numerous U.S. police forces train with the Israeli Defense Force to learn and share violent tactics and weaponry to uphold settler colonial occupation; and

Whereas, in 2019, U.S. police departments received upwards of \$115 billion dollars in combined state, local, federal, and corporate funding, and funds spent on policing are often the largest allocation to a single department, bureau, etc. out of a city's budget, which significantly outpaces expenditures on things we know keep communities safe: stable housing, reliable transportation, police-free education, food security, racism-free health- and mental health care, income assistance, clean water and air, access to green space, etc; and

Whereas US city, town, and county governments collectively lose well over a billion dollars annually in settlements, damages, litigation costs, and municipal bond interest for police misconduct lawsuits, from normally coming from cities' towns' and counties' general funds, and never the police budgets; and

Whereas, the Minneapolis Police Department has implemented nearly every single liberal reform proposed in the U.S., and that hasn't stopped them from murdering Black people, including George Floyd; and

Whereas, to reiterate, there is *no* acceptable amount of Black murder by police, and every interaction a Black person has with police--regardless of the race or gender of the officers--invites incredible potential for violence against that Black person;

Therefore, be it resolved that the National Lawyers Guild at its 2020 Law for the People Convention calls for the defunding, dismantling and abolition of all forms of policing. We will never achieve "police accountability," because we know the police will never be accountable to the people, only to the white supremacist, capitalist, settler colonial state, and that such efforts only serve to legitimize policing as an institution with the potential to create publicly safety. We know it is not. We thus do not support any measures or reforms that extend the life or scope of the prison industrial complex, including, but not limited to, body cameras for police; additional bias, weapons, cultural sensitivity, or other training for police; police specialty units like those intended to engage in "gang policing" or to police homelessness or those experiencing mental health crisis; community or civilian oversight boards for police; "community policing"; special prosecution or any form of prosecution of killer cops. § 1983, *Monell*, tort, etc. litigation can be a mechanism to help limit the life and scope of policing.

## **Implementation**

This resolution is to be implemented by the committees and individuals listed in support below, and in coordination with the NLG National Office. The individuals listed below will contact and coordinate with committees, chapters, and other NLG entities to inform them via a national press release, and assist them in educating their members (including via ongoing abolitionist political education and skill building) and the public about this issue.

### **Submitted by:**

The Anti-Racism Committee of the National Lawyers Guild

The Disability Justice Committee of the National Lawyers Guild

The Mass Defense Committee of the National Lawyers Guild

The Queer Caucus of the National Lawyers Guild

Pooja Gehi, Executive Director of the National Lawyers Guild

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### *Additional Resources:*

[Critical Resistance's Policing Timeline](#)

[Critical Resistance's Abolish Policing webpage tab](#)

[Critical Resistance's "Reformist Reforms vs. Abolitionist Steps in Policing" Chart](#)

[Interrupting Criminalization's #DefundthePolice Toolkit](#)

["Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police" by Mariame Kaba](#)

["How I Became a Police Abolitionist" by Derecka Purnell](#)

["No More Money for the Police" by Philip V. McHarris & Thenjiwe McHarris](#)

["Why Sex Work Should Be Decriminalized" by Human Rights Watch](#)