



## Pennsylvania Council of Churches

### Tyre's Life Mattered



The murder of Tyre Nichols by five Memphis police officers while being beaten 80 yards from his home is an affront to the entire human family. Not only were Tyre's human rights violated, so was his humanity.

Michelangelo's masterpiece, "The Creation," etched upon the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, depicts God touching the fingertips of Adam as an expression of the spiritual giving of life to humankind. This painting also represents that within each one of us there is a spark of divinity. On January 7, 2023, in a Memphis, Tennessee neighborhood, 5 police officer, deputies of the Shelby County Sheriff Department and emergency technicians not only failed to render aid to a beaten man; they also neglected to see his humanity and the spark of divinity within him.

The color of the "public servants" does not matter; the culture which perpetuates violence against Black bodies and the over policing of Black communities does. These are issues with which our faith communities and policy makers must grapple. Addressing the inherent violence that exists within our society calls for a systemic analysis of the many failures that cause crime, poverty, and the disintegration of communities. One of the factors impacting communities of color is over policing and the blatant disregard for Black and Brown lives by law enforcement.

I applaud the actions of Cerelyn Davis, the Memphis Chief of Police and the Shelby County District Attorney Steve Mulroy. Their decisive actions fashioned what could have been an even greater tragedy of violence around the nation into a model for how police misconduct should be addressed.

One way that we can act is to advocate for the passage of the George Floyd Justice and Policing Act.

This bill which passed in the House but died in the Senate in 2021 addresses a wide range of policies and issues regarding policing practices and law enforcement accountability. It increases accountability for law enforcement misconduct, restricts the use of certain policing practices, enhances transparency and data collection, and establishes best practices and training requirements. The bill enhances existing enforcement mechanisms to remedy violations by law enforcement. Among other things, it does the following:

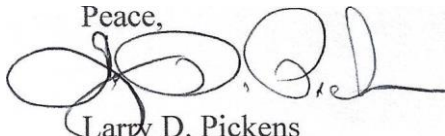
- o lowers the criminal intent standard—from willful to knowing or reckless—to convict a law enforcement officer for misconduct in a federal prosecution,
- limits qualified immunity as a defense to liability in a private civil action against a law enforcement officer, and
- grants administrative subpoena power to the Department of Justice (DOJ) in pattern-or-practice investigations.

It establishes a framework to prevent and remedy racial profiling by law enforcement at the federal, state, and local levels. It also limits the unnecessary use of force and restricts the use of no-knock warrants, chokeholds, and carotid holds.

The bill creates a national registry—the National Police Misconduct Registry—to compile data on complaints and records of police misconduct. It also establishes new reporting requirements, including on the use of force, officer misconduct, and routine policing practices (e.g., stops and searches).

Finally, it directs DOJ to create uniform accreditation standards for law enforcement agencies and requires law enforcement officers to complete training on racial profiling, implicit bias, and the duty to intervene when another officer uses excessive force.

We are not helpless in this struggle. Our voices have influence. As faith leaders we are called to be thermostats instead of thermometers. Thermometers merely reflect the temperature of the environment. Thermostats, however, set the temperature, take the lead in the policy making conversations. Our voices must be heard, and we must all find ways to affirm the human rights and dignity of all persons.

Peace,  
  
Larry D. Pickens  
Executive Director