

To our elected officials,

We, as members of the Woods Hole research community and those who support it, are outraged by the constant pain and suffering that our Black colleagues, mentors, students, friends, and family must endure. Police brutality and white supremacy have been tormenting the Black community for far too long, and enough is enough. It is truly disheartening that these cases are part of the “American” norm where 1,276 black people have been killed by on-duty police officers since January 1st, 2015.¹ Black men are killed by police at a rate 2.5 times greater than white Americans, despite being less likely to be armed.² It goes without saying that Black Americans are incarcerated at a rate five times greater than White Americans.³ We say their names with love and in solidarity with their communities: George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Philando Castile, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner, among others.

The onset of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19 disease) has shone light on the immense racial and social disparities imposed on Black communities through our healthcare system. COVID-19 racial tracking data highlights that Black Americans are dying at a disproportionate rate, nearly two times their population share, than White Americans.⁴ We understand that this is the result of historic and systemic racism that is deeply rooted in our history as a nation, including policies like redlining and the G.I. Bill.

Our very own research institutions are no exception. The research community of Woods Hole has a long history of discrimination and bias towards people of color in the sciences. This is showcased in the 2018 Diversity and Inclusion Report and Recommendations, written by Robert Livingston and commissioned by the Woods Hole Science Institutions. In our Woods Hole community, Robert Livingston clearly lays out the dearth of diversity, absence of cultural competency, lack of psychological safety, presence of overt racism and aggressions/microaggressions, and the presence of apathy.⁵ However, the research community commits itself to listen, learn, and take actionable steps to dismantle the systemic racism plaguing our Black communities. We support organizations that are committing themselves to the end of the disenfranchisement of Black communities across the nation.

Here, we request that you, as our elected official, commit to support policies that redirect a portion of police funding to supporting social services including mental health counseling, social workers, medical professionals, and educational professionals. Also, we urge you to commit to this 10 point plan proposed by the Massachusetts Black and Latino Caucus for the justice of our Black communities. At the federal level, we demand you:

1. Pass congresswoman Pressley’s Resolution to condemn police brutality, racial profiling and the excessive use of force
2. Improve oversight and independent investigations to hold individual law enforcement officers and police departments accountable

¹Tate, J., Jenkins, J., & Rich, S. (2020, January 22). Fatal Force: Police shootings database. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>

²Edwards, F., Lee, H., & Esposito, M. (2019). Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race–ethnicity, and sex. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(34), 16793–16798. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1821204116

³Criminal Justice Fact Sheet. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>

⁴The COVID Racial Data Tracker. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://covidtracking.com/race>

⁵Mizes-Tan, S. (2019, December 16). Woods Hole Science Institutions Stung by Diversity Report: 'Preponderance of Overt Racism'.

3. Reassertion of the Department of Justice in its statutory authority to investigate individual instances of racial profiling, police brutality and violence; and investigate and litigate individual law enforcement officers and police departments routinely violating civil rights
4. Adopt sound and unbiased law enforcement policies at all levels of government that reduce the disparate impact of police brutality, racial profiling and use of force on Black and Brown people and other historically marginalized communities

At the state level, we demand you:

5. Create a “Special Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training” to enact policies that certify police officers and enables the decertification of police officers for misconduct and abuse (H2146)
6. Create an Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity that will establish a peace officer exam advisory board to review appointments and the promotions of police officers. As well as establish guidelines for diversity plans for all state agencies (H2292)
7. The establishment of a commission that studies the systemic and structural racism that has led to the disproportionate number of minorities in the criminal justice system (H1440)
8. The adoption of clear limits for police use of force, including choke-holds, and the requirement of both 1) independent investigations of officer-related deaths, and 2) data collection and reporting by every department on the racial make-up of all arrests and police uses of force

At the local level, we demand you:

9. Declare Racism as a Public Health Crisis, so that the socioeconomic and health disparities can finally receive appropriate assessment, treatment, and financial investment.
10. Create a Civil Review Board/Commission with subpoena power to investigate allegations of law enforcement wrongdoing

Hoping for a just future,

The Woods Hole research community