June 16, 2020

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Feinstein:

On behalf of the 121,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing to express our great appreciation for your leadership in addressing racial disparities by holding the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee hearing tomorrow on Police Use of Force and Community Relations. Our nation is in the midst of a racism pandemic, and it is past time to fix these inequities by making bold reforms in our policing laws and practices.

APA believes longstanding change starts with our willingness to acknowledge racism as a public health crisis, as well as our openness to engage in honest dialogues about our criminal justice system. Racism has dire consequences, particularly for our African American citizens and other communities of color, who disproportionately suffer from the structural inequities and personal biases embedded within our society. Since the 1940s, psychologists have made fundamental contributions to our understanding of the nature of prejudice, stereotypes, and their impact on shaping human actions, emotions, and judgments. It is from this scientific evidence-base that we submit our congressional testimony for your consideration, which includes the following recommendations:

- **Promote community policing.** APA calls on Congress to implement community-based policing nationwide. Research shows that this approach increases community trust.

- **Ban chokeholds and strangleholds.** These tactics can be deadly or have serious neurocognitive impacts. These solutions should account for the safety of the officer in dangerous situations, as well as the safety of individuals interacting with law enforcement.

- **Invest in crisis intervention teams.** Psychologists play a key role in community-based, crisis intervention teams that train police officers to safely and effectively deal with situations involving individuals with serious mental illness. Tailored by each community to fit local needs, these teams unite the efforts of police officers, mental health educators, and community advocates to resolve and de-escalate potentially violent situations in positive ways.

- **Increase the number of mental health professionals in law enforcement agencies.** Mental health professionals can provide training and resources to help identify and defuse potential conflicts between law enforcement and the community. They are also skilled in identifying and
addressing issues affecting police officers and staff including stress, trauma, family support, and education.

- **Involve psychologists in multidisciplinary teams to implement police reforms.** These professionals need to be empowered to help monitor police officers' stress levels, mental health, burnout, and attitudes toward the public. Police psychologists are needed to help optimize police department cultures, develop leaders, and institute a “preservation of life” policing orientation.

- **Encourage private/public partnerships between mental health organizations and local law enforcement.** These partnerships can develop best practices for addressing community and police relations that can be disseminated widely across the nation to police departments and mental health facilities. Police-community partnerships encouraged by the Community Oriented Policing Office (COPS) of the Department of Justice (e.g., athletic leagues) can decrease stereotypes and increase citizen engagement.

- **Discourage police management policies and practices that can trigger implicit and explicit biases.** Research shows that certain types of proactive policies may be more effective at reducing racial disparities than are interventions designed to eliminate implicit bias.

- **Strengthen data collection.** Created following recommendations by the Task Force on 21st Century Policing, the Police Data Initiative supports local police department efforts to leverage data to increase transparency and accountability and build trust with their communities. Different from data on crime, these datasets may include data on stops and searches, uses of force, officer involved shootings, or other police actions.

- **Bolster research.** APA calls for re-establishing a Science Advisory Board at the Department of Justice to help bridge the divide between research and practice in criminal justice fields. Through regular interactions with the Office of Justice Programs leadership and staff, members of the board would gain a deeper appreciation of the complexities of implementing and evaluating innovative approaches to the administration of criminal and juvenile justice.

APA stands ready to assist the Judiciary Committee in finding impactful bipartisan solutions to address racial disparities and improve trust in our policing systems. Please contact Ben Vonachen at (303) 229-5737 or bvonachen@apa.org if our association can be a resource.

Sincerely,

Arthur C. Evans, Jr., PhD
Chief Executive Officer