



Justice Reform & Accountability Alliance

January 29, 2021

Dear Speaker Frierson and Senator Cannizzaro:

The undersigned organizations are members of the Justice Reform & Accountability Alliance (JRAA). We are a group of community advocates, attorneys, policy specialists, families of incarcerated individuals, and victims of police violence. We write to remind Democratic leadership of promises made during the 32nd Special Session and call on you to renew your commitment to address police and criminal justice reform and the white supremacy that plagues these systems.

Last summer, voices across the country coalesced to demand justice for the police killing of George Floyd. In Nevada, months of large-scale protests endeavored to signal to those in power the urgent need for transparency and accountability in a criminal legal system that treats Black and Brown bodies as dispensable.

In response, Democratic lawmakers acknowledged criminal legal system inequities, including problems with policing, declared racism a public health issue, and expressed support for substantive change. Limited reforms passed during the 32nd Special Session, including minor amendments to Senate Bill 242, the Peace Officers' Bill of Rights. AB3 banned police officers' use of chokeholds and established a duty to intervene. While grateful for these reforms, advocates, activists, and community members made clear that these minimal advances were insufficient to address the breadth and depth of systemic racism and police violence.

Legislators acknowledged the need for additional measures and vowed to address the same during the upcoming regular session, when they would have more time to focus on this complex problem. Governor Steve Sisolak agreed with the community, proclaiming on August 5, 2020 that racism is a public health crisis.¹ In signing SB2 and AB3 into law, he stated that, "We will not squander this opportunity [for change]. We will push forward. This moment will not be fleeting and forgotten . . . [m]y administration will continue to pursue change."²

¹ https://gov.nv.gov/News/Proclamations/2020/Racism_as_a_Public_Health_Crisis/

²

https://gov.nv.gov/News/Press/2020/Gov_Sisolak_signs_criminal_justice_reform_legislation_from_32nd_Legislative_Special_Session/ (emphasis added).

Community stakeholders remain hopeful that Democratic lawmakers will honor their promise to pursue criminal legal system reform, including comprehensive police reform aimed at achieving transparency, accountability, and community trust. However, we were understandably disappointed when criminal legal system reform was not mentioned in Governor Sisolak's State of the State Address. Community stakeholders are further disheartened by certain indications that Democratic leadership has no desire to hear so-called "controversial" legislation. This only exacerbates our concerns that, with two prosecutors at the helm of the Senate Judiciary Committee, legislation championing police reform, death penalty repeal, and other measures aimed at breathing equity into a broken system may never see a hearing.

During a conversation with the Nevada Independent, no legislator volitionally discussed police reform, or broader criminal legal system reform. The only comment came from Senate Majority Leader Nicole Cannizzaro in response to a pointed question. She offered only this: The legislature will "continue to have this conversation and hopefully move forward." We understood her comments to signal a lack of will amongst Democratic leadership to take on reform as previously promised. We hope we misconstrued these comments and invite Democratic leadership to set the record straight by publicly declaring a commitment to criminal legal system reform—including police reform—during 2021 session.

We understand the difficulties before you this session. The COVID-19 pandemic devastated the budget and strained every sector of the economy. However, the legislature fully understood these difficulties during the special session when leadership promised to take on the systemic inequities that victimize Nevada's most vulnerable populations. The budget and the pandemic are not an excuse for inaction this session.

The public outcry for justice is more than a "fleeting and forgotten" moment. Just this month we witnessed the stark contrast between law enforcement's treatment of white supremacist insurrectionists attacking our nation's capital compared to their brutal treatment of Black and brown protestors marching for racial justice this past summer. This moment demands meaningful and comprehensive police reform.

The JRAA calls on the legislature to address the following:

1. The abolition of capital punishment.
2. The end of qualified immunity and the establishment of a stringent statewide use of force policy.
3. The comprehensive collection and publication of data regarding all complaints of officer misconduct, substantiated or not, and any discipline imposed pursuant to such complaints, as well data regarding all vehicular and pedestrian stops and post-stop policing broken down by location as well as race, sex, age, and other relevant demographics.

4. The establishment of a Special Prosecutor or a panel of independent prosecutors to investigate and prosecute when appropriate all cases involving officer-involved homicides or use of force that results in serious bodily harm.

The JRAA is united and resolute in ensuring that our representatives keep their promises. We expect Democratic Leadership, Nevada legislators, and Governor Sisolak to honor their prior commitments, and expend the requisite political capital to achieve the same.

ACLU of Nevada

Battle Born Progress

Families United 4 Justice Las Vegas

Forced Trajectory Project

Make it Work Nevada

Mass Liberation Project

Mi Familia Vota Nevada

NAACP Las Vegas

Nevada Attorneys for Criminal Justice

Nevada Coalition Against the Death Penalty

Nevada Strong Families

Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada

The Fines and Fees Justice Center