

September 21, 2022

Sheriff Austin Garrett
Hamilton County Sheriff's Office
600 Market Street, Suite G10
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Dear Sheriff Garrett:

Since 2018 members of the clergy have made multiple attempts to host a meeting between community members and the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office regarding excessive use of force and hiring policies as well as conditions within Silverdale Detention Center. A representative from the Department of Justice has reached out to you and your department multiple times to mediate, with full transparency, a conversation between Chattanooga Clergy for Justice and the HCSO regarding these policies, including most recently, this summer, when both you and DA Coty Wamp responded to the DOJ request with a refusal to meet until after the election. The time has arrived.

Since our initial request to address these issues with the department there are have been multiple deaths of incarcerated individuals at Silverdale (including one this week), we have heard from multiple victims about abuse at the hands of HCS Officers, and now we see that Officer Tyler McRae, who has a history of accusations and lawsuits against him for participating or standing silently by as women, children, and other populations were sexually assaulted by your department's officers¹, is involved in an incident of excessive force against a child. He was removed from the streets and put over the care of our children. Why was this officer ever placed as an SRO at a school? No child, regardless of age, should feel unsafe in school.

We call for:

- Officer Tyler McRae's immediate removal from East Ridge High School or that of any school based on this and past incidents with women and children.

¹ See <https://www.courthousenews.com/tennessee-cop-accused-of-groping-minors-faces-fourth-lawsuit/>, <https://www.fox13now.com/news/national-news/woman-who-says-tennessee-deputy-forcibly-baptized-her-found-dead>, and <https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/kgj-wilkey.pdf>

- A response by October 3, 2022, to the DOJ representative with an agreed upon date and time for a conversation mediated by the representative between you and Chattanooga Clergy for Justice regarding changes use of force and hiring policies of HCSO, as well as, addressing feeding and medication schedules at Silverdale Detention Center.

Once again, these are not “isolated incidents” within HCSO. Excessive use of force against Hamilton County’s citizens is often perpetuated by the same officers. How many more of these videos of brutality by deputies of the Hamilton County Sheriff’s Department do we need to see to recognize that this is systemic, that this is a pattern and practice of its officers?

Reforms to curtail police brutality and harassment must be a collective endeavor between law enforcement, elected leaders, and the community. Change requires good faith partners, and we believe there are many good faith partners who recognize systemic racism plagues our society and that the current police methodology is inept. In order for trust to be built, and the community to trust your leadership of the HCSO, it is urgent that we meet before another woman, child, or citizen is victimized by your officers. We look forward to hearing from you by October 3.

Signed,

Chattanooga Clergy for Justice

cc: (via electronic mail)

Hamilton County Mayor Weston Wamp
Hamilton County Board of Commissioners
Hamilton County District Attorney Coty Wamp
Governor of Tennessee Bill Lee