

PRESS RELEASE

The recent guilty verdict against former Minneapolis Police Officer Derrick Chauvin for murdering George Floyd has prompted community leaders nationally to call for police and sheriff's departments to restructure and reevaluate their current policing practices and policies. Departments who choose to engage in these processes have shown a decrease in excessive use of force against citizens while simultaneously increasing officer accountability.

Unfortunately, leadership in the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) has chosen to ignore the cries of its community. To date the HCSO has chosen to ignore and/or deny meeting with the HCSO Minority Relations Task Force, Chattanooga Clergy for Justice, community organizers, taxpayers, AND the US Department of Justice regarding these issues. Evidence of our efforts are as follows:

- On March 5, 2021, Walter Atkinson with the Community Relations Service of the United States Department of Justice offered to mediate a meeting between the HCSO, the Chattanooga Clergy for Justice, and the community to reevaluate current HCSO use of force policy.
- On March 11, 2021, the Chattanooga Clergy for Justice met with Walter Atkinson to express our concerns regarding several cases of HCSO deputies using excessive force on citizens while handcuffed.
- From March 11, 2021 – March 25, 2021, Walter Atkinson contacted the HCSO EEOC Officer and Sheriff Hammond to schedule a meeting to discuss HCSO current use of force between the HCSO, Chattanooga Clergy for Justice, and the community. There was no response from the HCSO.
- On March 25, 2021, the Chattanooga Clergy for Justice and Community Organizers responded to Sheriff Hammond's February 17, 2021 release of HCSO current policies on use of force. In our March 25th response, we indicated the policy was too broad and had too many areas where the policy allowed officers to use individual discretion. The response outlined two of the specific areas in the current policy needing more objective language.
- On April 6, 2021, the HCSO responded, "I'm fully aware of the two concerns you've posted in the reply to the article [HCSO policy released February 17th]. If the two concerns you've posted are it, there is no need for a meeting. Sheriff Hammond has made it clear in his response about the Hamilton County Sheriff's Department policy. The policies align with State and Federal guidelines and current case law."

Sheriff Hammond continues to assert his willingness to "sit down" with clergy and resolve problems within his department. However, Sheriff Hammond has once again shown he has no interest in meeting with clergy, the community, or the US Department of Justice. He is also not interested in holding his officers accountable for breaking the law and using excessive force against our citizens. Therefore, the Chattanooga Clergy for Justice and its coalition of

community groups and members will issue a formal complaint with the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and we are asking the DOJ to initiate a formal patterns and process investigation against the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, as it has done in Minneapolis and Louisville. We can no longer sit by while the HSCO continues to use excessive force to brutalize the people of Hamilton County and do nothing to protect the civil rights of her citizens. We call on Attorney General Merrick Garland to do what no one has been able to do, hold Sheriff Hammond and his officers accountable!

Why do we continue this fight? Why do we continue to demand accountability from Sheriff Hammond and the HCSO? We continue our fight and our demand for accountability in the tradition of the prophet Micah. Micah stood in the presence of corruption in the city and proclaimed, "Do Justice"! The Hebrew word *mishpat* translated as justice, meaning, "Make it right." God requires we stand for those who have been wronged and demand that it be made right.

Charles Toney was beaten while handcuffed, make it right!

James Mitchell was illegally cavity searched on the highway, make it right!

Reginald Arrington was beaten by 5 officers while handcuffed, make it right!

We call Attorney General Merrick Garland to make it right!

We call on God to make it right!

Chattanooga Clergy for Justice + Organizer Coalition

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