

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Black Elected Officials of Hillsborough County Joint Statement on Recent Reports of Unprovoked Use of Force by Tampa Police Department

Tampa, Fla. - The recent reports of the Tampa Police Department's unprovoked use of force against protestors peacefully exercising their constitutional rights to freedom of assembly and to freedom of speech cannot go unchecked. At least three incidents that have come to our attention. The first occurred on the afternoon of May 30, 2020, when the Tampa Police Department reportedly used rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse a peaceful gathering of protestors at Cyrus Greene Park. The second occurred on the evening of June 2, 2020, and into the early morning hours on June 3, 2020, when the Tampa Police Department used the same aggressive and dehumanizing tactics to disperse crowds of peaceful protestors in downtown Tampa. The third occurred on June 1, 2020, when the Tampa Police Department reportedly used force against an unarmed black man while on the grounds of Tampa General Hospital. While this last incident is unrelated to any protest, it is equally disturbing.

Let us be clear: we strongly condemn the use of force or violence by law enforcement against any protestor who peacefully exercises their rights to the freedom of assembly and expression. We also condemn the use of force or violence by law enforcement against unarmed individuals whose only crime appears to be living while black.

To reiterate our recent joint statement against the rioting by those who crossed the line from civil disobedience to destruction, we maintain our united call for peace. But make no mistake: in order for our community to experience the healing that it desperately needs, all stakeholders must be equally committed to doing their part to attain peace. This means that law enforcement must be held accountable for its actions as well.

It is time for a new era of common-sense reforms to ensure greater transparency in policing and stronger limits on the use of force. Hence, we, the undersigned black elected officials, call on Mayor Jane Castor and Tampa Police Department Chief Brian Dugan to end the wrongful

practice of the use of force during otherwise peaceful protests immediately. We further call on Mayor Castor and Chief Dugan to provide with respect to the aforementioned incidents an accounting of the officers' actions, a report on what corrective action, if any, TPD has taken based on complaints about the officers' conduct and/or feedback from the community, and an explanation to the community as to why TPD used force against protestors engaged in peaceful and lawful actions in the first place. Further, the officers involved in the incident at Tampa General Hospital should be relieved of duty at this time until the investigation into their conduct is complete.

Senator Darryl Rouson,
Representative Dianne Hart
Representative Fentrice Driskell
Representative Wengay "Newt" Newton
County Commissioner Lesley "Les" Miller
Tampa City Councilman Orlando Gudes
School Board Member Tamara Shamburger

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