

Remarks: State of Police Reform Press Conference

Rebecca Bennett, Forward Through Ferguson Co-Chair

My name is Rebecca Bennett, Co-Chair of Forward Through Ferguson.

Forward Through Ferguson was established to be a catalyst for lasting, positive change in the St. Louis region, as outlined in the Ferguson Commission Report.

Embracing the Ferguson Commission's mandate, we work to center impacted communities and mobilize accountable bodies to advance racially equitable systems and policies that ensure all people in our region can thrive.

We work to dismantle systemic racism and advance St. Louis down the path to Racial Equity, a state where our regional systems work well for all people so that life outcomes are no longer predicted by race.

We believe deeply in this mandate, which was also articulated by the larger community as a guiding vision we call #STL2039. The year 2039 is the year when we reach a tipping point, when Racial Equity is more of a lived reality than a communal dream.

2039 is 25 years after the killing of Michael Brown and to get to this future requires sustained action on three core strategies named in FTF's Action Plan:

- Advance policy and systems change with community accountability;
- Create a lasting culture and practice of equity that shifts local and regional power; and

- Build the human and financial capital to sustain the generational work of transforming St. Louis.

Given our charge and our vision, it would be easy to state that over the last five years, progress in St. Louis has been stagnant — an even mix of steps forward and steps backward.

In the time since the release of the Ferguson Commission report, which synthesized the input, insights, and intelligence of more than 3,000 St. Louisans, it's true that we've seen both growing energy and frustrating latency ...

... We've seen people and institutions coalesce, impactfully using the framework of Racial Equity while others latched onto the term superficially, resisting structural changes in policy, power, and resource distribution ...

... We've seen grassroots efforts with groundbreaking electoral consequences at the same time as reactive entrenchment of regressive politics at the local, state, and national levels.

Last year, Forward Through Ferguson released our inaugural **State of the Report**, which found only 5 of the 47 signature priorities of the Commission had seen significant implementation.

In a series of town halls, community members pushed us to delve deeper: to tell the story of the region's unsteady progress; to bring transparency to spaces that are often intentionally secretive; and to share tools for community accountability so that residents could impact systemic change.

Acting on the guidance of our community, this year we have reoriented our focus to dive into the space that sparked the Ferguson Uprising and that has experienced the least amount of positive change.

This evening, we are excited to share with you the next entry in the annual State of St. Louis Series: the **State of Police Reform**.

The road to transformational justice is nonlinear, long, and often frustrating. However, from our analysis, a few things are clear:

- More people today, inside and outside of the system, are dissatisfied with the status quo.
- There's a disconnected – but growing – bench of advocates who understand institutional racism and systems change.
- St. Louis is in desperate need of effective and wholistic public safety that doesn't rely on the failed arrest-and-incarcerate model.

These and other findings in the State of Police Reform have only made us more adamant that St. Louis can be and must become a national innovator for Racial Equity that takes bold and decisive steps toward a healed future.