

Opinion: Why We Need A Uniform Police Code



BY: Congressman RMSteve



New York State Police in Buffalo after pushing Martin Gugino to the ground during the Black Lives Matter protests and associated civil unrest

Since its inception in the 19th century to combat the growing crime prevalent in the industrial cities of the United States, the police has been a generally dependable institution in the preservation of law and order throughout the country. However, they have also been used in unlawful deeds like preventing the integration of a particular segregating state and implemented cruel tactics like that during the Columbia University takeover, the Chicago Democratic National Convention, and various other incidents around the country at different times. In those times, the police have implemented methods including using tear gas, rubber bullets, high-pressure water cannons and hoses, attack dogs, and even live ammunition.

Over the last few decades, as everything has become digitized and accessible to billions across the planet, everyone in the world is able to witness acts of police brutality that, before, went unnoticed and unheard of. From Rodney King in Los Angeles to Abner Louima in New York, from Laquan McDonald to Eric Garner, from Breonna Taylor to George Floyd, the nation has seen these and so many more innocents suffer under brutality. Qualified immunity and police unions and lobbyists virtually shield all bad officers from justice. This is only counting the major incidents, not even the many and many minor incidents of assaults and shootings. This definitely does not count the billions of dollars in private property that is stolen by police through civil asset forfeiture of people who have not been charged with a crime.

Last year, the nation was rocked by protests in search of justice for George Floyd, who was killed in Minneapolis after having officer Derek Chauvin's knee on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. Anger over qualified immunity, anger over police unions, anger over laws that give police enormous powers to the point of unconstitutionality, anger over the lack of proper and uniform ethics code and community policing techniques, and anger over the failure of the justice system to bring justice to victims. Laws across the nation and Supreme Court rulings give police the authority to enter a person's property without announcing their presence, laws across the nation give police power to seize a person's assets and property even without being charged for a crime, laws across the nation provide immunity for bad police officers, laws across the nation provide for the combative and tense stance of police instead of de-escalation, ethics, and community training.

This country needs massive reforms in how it polices its citizens, from reforms in civil asset forfeiture to demilitarization of the police to getting rid of qualified immunity once and for all to getting rid of no-knock warrants. Some states are already considering bills that change about these aspects of policing. A major aspect, however, is a police code of conduct, preferably a uniform code adopted by all of the states, that punishes certain criminal acts and prevents a majority of cases of police brutality from occurring again. Right now, each state and unit of local government has scattered laws and ordinances on the conduct of police officers, which brings about a confusing legal landscape when bad officers are trying to be prosecuted. In such a code of conduct, besides inscribing punitive actions, methods of training and procedures must be included as well to give the

legislatures more control over police training, especially in matters involving high tension and escalation.

This is only a start to a long road to better policing and protection of the rights of citizens. We have more to go and more to do before Americans' legal and constitutional rights are bolstered in the face of policing and police officers are once again known as the protectors of the community rather than a paramilitary force seeking to control the populace. We can and we will fix our policing system, and a uniform code of conduct is the way to begin.