

DC Council Judiciary and Public Safety Public Hearing

October 15, 2020 - Virtual Hearing 3 Min. Testimony

Good Evening Council,

Thank you for allowing me to provide my oral testimony today.

My name is Beverly Smith. I was born and raised in the District of Columbia. I am currently a Ward 8 resident.

I am glad to see that other kinds of unjust killings besides police shootings are being considered in the "Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Act of 2020" such as choke hold restraints, however, it isn't comprehensive enough. The current legislation does not address the knee in the back. My 27 year old son, Alonzo Smith, who was unarmed and did not commit a crime, died in the custody of two Special Police Officers (SPO's) at the Marbury Plaza apartment complex in the District of Columbia (DC), on November 1, 2015. His death was ruled a homicide, compression of the torso, which is knee in the back. No indictment for his murder.

I have been fighting hard for change over the past five years for police and special police reform. There have been several proposed legislations for SPO's in DC after my son's death by Mayor Bowser and Councilmember McDuffie, but like a lot of other proposals there were no final action and no meaningful change.

In 2018, a 36 year old Florida man, Timothy Coffman, died while in police custody from compression of the torso (knee in the back).

In January 2020, a 37 year old Illinois man, Eric Lurry, died in the custody of police after having a baton shoved in his mouth and pinching his nose.

Recently, in May 2020, 46 year old Minneapolis man, George Floyd, died in custody of the police from positional asphyxia restraint (knee pressed in his neck).

There are roughly 7,700 SPO's in DC and about 4,500 are armed. They are regulated and licensed by the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) with little to no oversight. Some are licensed to carry a firearm with only 40 hours of inadequate training in contrast to MPD who are required to have at least 28 weeks of training before being licensed to carry a firearm. There's a lack of quality and quantity of training for SPO's which put DC residents at high risk. Currently, they are only required to have 40 hours of limited inadequate training before assigned to a post.

Additionally, DC residents do not have any online mechanism to file a complaint against a SPO for excessive use of force or other complaints. Myself, along with Virginia Spatz has created a database for DC residents to report complaints against SPO's at Spodatadc.org.

I currently have a petition to "Disarm and Reform" SPO's in DC at DCJusticeLab/Justice4Zo.org with the following four demands:

1. Disarming special police officers;
2. Increasing the quantity and quality of training required;
3. Passing the "Special Police Officer Amendment Act;" and
4. Prohibiting pursuit beyond property boundaries.

I demand that my legislation "Disarm and Reform" SPO's in DC be introduced without waiting for a consensus on every part of the bill.

Thank you for listening!