



The Association of
BLACK PSYCHOLOGISTS

New Jersey Chapter

50 Church Street, Suite 102
Montclair, NJ 07042
www.NJABPsi.org

October 31, 2021

Andrew J. Bruck
Acting Attorney General
The State of New Jersey

Re: Preventable deadly police assaults

Dear Attorney General Bruck,

We write to you from the New Jersey Chapter of the Association of Black Psychologists. We are a professional association with a 40+ year history (see <http://www.njabpsi.org/>). We are a chapter of The Association of Black Psychologists (<https://www.abpsi.org/>) with national headquarters in Fort Washington, Maryland. Our members include Psychologists who provide mental health and related care in independent practice; in hospitals and health settings; and in schools, universities, and other educational institutions. Our members include university administrators and professors, court approved expert witnesses, as well as consultants to corporate, religious, and governmental organizations. Our members also include graduate and undergraduate students who are studying toward careers in psychology and related fields.

On Saturday October 16th the Peoples' Organization for Progress and other groups completed the Long March for Justice from Montclair to Trenton. Police accountability for preventable deaths was the leading issue on the agenda for the marchers. We applaud the marchers and their supporters.

We have raised our voice to address the issue of police excessive force in the past and we are compelled to speak to this issue again. As reported in the press, on July 4th of this year, another preventable deadly encounter with law enforcement occurred in our state. A *New Jersey Herald* headline (9/14/21) tells an all too familiar and chilling story.

"I called them for help, not murder!: Wife, family want change after fatal Newton shooting"

Guila Dale was a 61-year-old decorated, Black army combat veteran. He had served three tours in Iraq. He was currently employed for the Joint Chiefs of Staff as an equal opportunity specialist in Washington, DC. He commuted to his home in Newton, New Jersey on weekends. He was scheduled to retire in October of 2021. Mr. Dale had been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Though the full story is still emerging, apparently on July 4th he suffered a post-traumatic stress reaction to the sound of fireworks. His wife, Karen, became concerned he was suicidal and called the police for help. Four minutes after the call was placed, Guila Dale was shot and killed by two white Newton Police officers in the front of the Dale home. According to an attorney for the one of the officers, Mr. Dale held a handgun.

While it has been reported the New Jersey Attorney General's Office is conducting an investigation, our concern is that this is neither an isolated, nor an unavoidable, tragedy. In 2010 our former President (Dr. James Walker) wrote to the then New Jersey Attorney General, Paula Dow, in the aftermath of Rahway Police officers shooting Fritz Louissaint, a man disabled with schizophrenia, five times. Gratefully, Mr. Louissaint survived the assault on his life. In the letter, Dr. Walker noted that though Mr. Louissaint was reportedly threatening with a knife, it was the responsibility of police to employ less lethal means in subduing persons with mental illness. Dr. Walker's letter also referenced the 2007 Maplewood police homicide of Omar Perry, which was widely reported in the regional press. Mr. Perry was another chronic psychiatric patient whose family called the local police to transport Mr. Perry to care. A July 13, 2007 editorial in *The Star-Ledger* titled, "Confronting the Mentally Ill", urged state authorities to take action to prevent this loss of life.

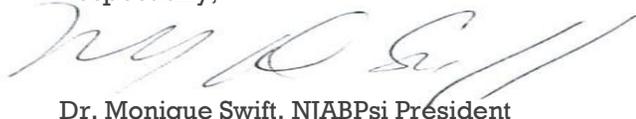
On December 4th, 2013, the Perth Amboy police shot and killed Dixon Rodriguez, who allegedly lunged at an officer with a knife. This was another case where the family had called police for assistance in having someone in need, transported for psychiatric care. We can list and recite several other cases of fatal, and near fatal, police 'assistance' in New Jersey, some involving people with mental illness and some without that feature. As you can imagine, many involve Black and Brown people though there have been white victims as well.

There are remedies and solutions to reduce these tragic outcomes. Mental health organizations and researchers have joined with law enforcement officials in many instances to initiate policy and practice to reduce this unfortunate loss of life and trauma. Without going into the details of these many approaches, we point out that remedies require not only training of police but also sufficient training of emergency call operators who need to know how to question those who initiate calls for help.

We are aware there are a series of bills currently pending in the New Jersey legislature designed to make police accountable for excessive and fatal violent encounters (A5301/S2656, to make police disciplinary records public; A45787/S3730, to end police qualified immunity; A4656/S2963, to protect civilian review boards with subpoena powers; A4284/S2617 to criminalize chokeholds; and A4526/S3825 to limit the use of deadly force). However, it is our view, the State's chief law enforcement officer can exercise his/or her responsibility to protect citizens, by leading law enforcement in adopting methods and practices designed to reduce human death and trauma. In this connection we are reminded that in 2005 the US Senate apologized to the victims of lynching, and their descendants, for failing to pass anti-lynching legislation in the early 20th Century. We call upon you to use your office to initiate remedies to the current crisis at this time.

We intend to reach out to other New Jersey mental health organizations (NJPA, LMHA, NAMI) to enlist their assistance in this work. We respectfully request to meet with you and/or your representative, in person or by virtual means, to further advance these concerns.

Respectfully,



Dr. Monique Swift, NJABPsi President



Dr. Barbara Prempeh, NJABPsi Vice President

CC: Governor Murphy
Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver

["I called for help for my husband because he was suicidal. I called them for help, not for murder," she said. "I was a witness to my husband's murder." As reported by Lori Comstock (9/14).]