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## **Over 400 Public Health Experts Call for Police Accountability**

BOSTON — More than 400 public health and health care leaders are calling on Massachusetts lawmakers to pass police reform that addresses the public health harms caused by racially disparate police violence and surveillance. [In a letter sent to lawmakers and released publicly today](#), the health professionals urge legislators to eliminate qualified immunity, require police officers to attempt de-escalation, and restrict harmful use of force practices.

“Systemic racism is a lethal public health crisis,” write public health experts in the letter. “The public health and health care community has long recognized the ways in which racism has contributed to the pervasive health inequities and injustices that permeate every aspect of existence for people of color, and have devastated both the physical and mental health of individuals subjected to these abuses on a daily basis.”

According to the letter, new state law must reduce the role of police in situations where social interventions are safer and more effective, and explicitly recognize that police violence poses dangers to public health. The public health experts, for example, support eliminating qualified immunity, a judicial doctrine that shields police from being held accountable to their victims even when excessive use of force results in serious physical harm or death.

“There can be no true health equity without transforming of our system of policing,” said **Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association**. “Our current laws do far too little to ensure equal justice for Black and Brown residents and far too much to shield police from accountability - and this is exactly what institutional racism looks like. The status quo must change and it must change now.”

“When doctors or other health care professionals harm people, they are held accountable,” said **Dr. Onyinyechi Eke, MD, a member of the Massachusetts Coalition for Health Equity**. “Qualified immunity shields police from consequences, and it must end now. Let’s be clear: People deserve to seek justice when they are hurt or when their loved ones are killed.”

“For too long, we as a Commonwealth have underinvested in and under-resourced Black and Latinx communities — leading to insufficient access to health care and dramatic health disparities. The systemic inequities blocking Black people’s access to basic health care are, in turn, worsened by systemic discrimination, racially motivated criminalization and over-policing,” said **Dr. Jennifer Childs-Roshak, President and CEO of the Planned**

**Parenthood League of Massachusetts.** “As medical providers, our top priority is the health and safety of our patients—and our care and advocacy for them doesn’t stop once they leave our health centers. We must replace excessive and discriminatory police practices with safe, sustainable public health approaches that truly protect and serve all communities.”

The public health experts join other groups demanding police reform and racial justice. Last week, faith leaders and labor unions called on lawmakers to pass state legislation that would limit police use of force and reform qualified immunity. Other organizations that support legislation to reform qualified immunity and institute other police accountability measures include 1199SEIU, Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, Jane Doe Inc., National Association of Social Workers - MA Chapter, and SEIU Local 509.

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