

Chicago Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression (CAARPR)
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PRESS STATEMENT

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U.S. Department of Justice: The Clock Is Ticking on Police Crime in Chicago

The United States Department of Justice has opened its investigation of the Chicago Police Department, focusing on "...CPD's use of force, including racial, ethnic and other disparities in their use of force, and its systems of accountability..." DOJ investigators were even called to the crime scene of the blatant police murders of Quintonio LeGrier and Bettie Jones. The victims and survivors of police crimes in Chicago have been calling on the DOJ to intervene in our city, where there are no systems of accountability - only an ongoing culture of impunity. We eagerly await the DOJ's findings but, by experience, have no illusions that change can come from any branch of government.

We at the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, alongside family members of victims of police murder, torture and abuse, originally made an urgent request for DOJ intervention in Chicago in August of 2014. We submitted a letter documenting unresolved complaints of CPD's patterns of abuse, especially in poor and minority neighborhoods. This letter was signed by 66 members of families of victims. We presented these documents at the Chicago field office of the DOJ, with copies going to the Attorney General's office in Washington, D.C. Our letter and these families were not acknowledged. One week later, U.S. Attorney Zachary Fardon emphasized that there was no impending investigation of the Chicago police, whom he called "our front-line partner".

Within two months of this inaction by the DOJ, both Ronnieman Johnson and Laquan McDonald lay dead. The video evidence was locked away and the cover-up was in high gear. And twenty more Black men were killed by CPD before the Laquan McDonald video was released by court order. Might some of them still be alive today had the DOJ acted in 2014?

On December 10, 2015 we came calling again. We submitted another letter at the Chicago office of the DOJ, together with more complaints signed by 90 family members, calling for DOJ intervention in Chicago to hold the police accountable pursuant to Civil Rights statutes and the U.S. Constitution. A crowd of 500 protesters joined us on the street below, as family members were herded into a small reception area and were not even extended the courtesy of a meeting where they could air their grievances. Again, copies of the letter were sent on to Washington. The letter and the attached complaints totaled 260 pages exposing damning evidence of racist police crimes in Chicago. The wait continued.

Then we heard that the DOJ had, indeed, decided to intervene in Chicago after weeks of protests and revelations of the cover-up surrounding the McDonald video. We delivered the letter again, with some revisions and an additional 10 complaints documenting police torture and murder in Chicago communities. These were all sent by registered mail. The final copy of the letter was sent on January 12, 2016 to Katelyn Smith, the Community Outreach Specialist tasked by the DOJ to coordinate the gathering of community complaints during the investigation of the CPD. She stated, "We believe that community involvement is going to be an essential component of our investigation." Apparently, it wasn't essential in 2014.

So, here come the Feds, and the clock is ticking. We won't continue to wait. We don't have another thirteen months. We demand that the CPD, its police board, IPRA, and the State's Attorney's office be fully investigated and the guilty be fired and prosecuted.

The DOJ investigation of the CPD provides an opportunity to redress the trail of tears left in the wake of past police violence in Chicago's communities. But, what of the future? Whatever the outcome of this investigation, it will end, and the Feds will pull up stakes. What will they leave behind? Recommendations? Monitoring? Consent decrees? Ask Cleveland how that worked out. The DOJ has had to intervene there a second time. Whatever they found before, they will find again and again. This is because the DOJ and the Federal Government are not about creating new institutions to ensure police accountability. These new institutions can only be forged by the people themselves. The only lasting solution is community control over the police, and in Chicago that is an all elected Civilian Police Accountability Council (CPAC).

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