



June 10, 2020

To:   Huntsville Mayor:                   Tommy Battle  
      City Council Members:           Frances Akridge; Will Culver; Devyn S. Keith;  
  Bill Kling; Jennie Robinson  
      Chief of Police:                 Mark McMurray  
      Madison County Sheriff:       Kevin Turner

**Subject: Police Reforms Needed in Huntsville, AL**

The League of Women Voters was founded in 1920 to encourage citizen engagement with the electoral and political processes. We advocate civic engagement by encouraging voter registration and education as well as informed and active participation at all levels of government.

The U.S. Constitution's 1st Amendment guarantees the right of citizens to express their opinions and to peacefully assemble to protest conditions which they perceive as unjust, unfair, or illegal. When a government acts to forcefully suppress and intimidate citizens who are seeking accountability and equal justice under the law, the League has a duty to speak out and demand that government officials honor their sacred trust to respect, protect, and listen to citizens who are expressing dissenting opinions.

Throughout the 200 years of Alabama's statehood, people of color have been victims of racial discrimination. Alabama's history has been filled with atrocities committed by those who are here to serve and protect all our residents.

On Monday June 1, and Wednesday, June 3, 2020, the latest chapter in Alabama's sad history of civil rights violations was written. The Huntsville police, Madison County Sheriff, and the Alabama State Troopers combined to attack demonstrators who were protesting police brutality. The attacks against protestors using riot gas, rubber bullets, flash bangs, mace, racing police cars, and helicopters were out of proportion to the action of the protestors.

Law enforcement actions endangered the protestors and the public. Furthermore, these actions appeared to be intended to intimidate, to create conflict and panic, and to provoke a violent confrontation. The presence of snipers on nearby rooftops reinforced the sense of an impending violent confrontation.



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After viewing live video from the scene, reviewing multiple videos from protestors, and watching the official statements afterwards, we are dismayed by the tactics used to disperse protestors. There was no evidence of violence or impending property damage at the time the police engaged the protestors. Firsthand accounts indicate that after forcing demonstrators into the park, "the police boxed in the crowd and then shot tear gas behind us."

The Chief of Police described the events as a "battle", rather than an operation to protect the peace, and ultimately blamed the victims. Although city officials spoke repeatedly of outside agitators to rationalize police behavior, none of the 22 people arrested were from outside of Madison County.

We are horrified at this threat to civil liberties, and deeply dismayed to find it here in a town we had believed to be a beacon of progress for the rest of Alabama. We urge our city and county leaders to ensure that the first amendment rights of all are protected. Our local government and police must put in place policies and procedures to ensure respectful and appropriate treatment of all people they are sworn to serve and protect. We stand ready to engage in civil dialogue with any and all interested stakeholders to address this issue and to ***Make Democracy Work for Huntsville, Madison County, and Alabama.***

Respectfully,



Kathy U. Jones

President, League of Women Voters of the Tennessee Valley

cc:

Alabama NAACP State President: Bernard Simelton  
NAACP Huntsville Chapter President: Jerry Burnett  
SPLC Senior Supervising Attorney for Criminal Justice Reform: Ebony Howard  
ACLU Alabama Executive Director: Randall Marshall  
LWV of Alabama State President: Barbara Caddell  
LWV of the United States: Chris Carson; Jessica Jones Capparell