

July 5, 2020

Sheriff Jim Hammond
Hamilton County Sheriff's Office
600 Market Street, Suite G10
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Dear Sheriff Hammond:

Our hearts are convicted that you must resign to allow our community to heal and seek justice. A resignation alone will not resolve the systemic racism that plagues our community—that work requires examining why a Black man asking for directions demands a police response in the first place, and why walking down a street without sidewalks justifies an arrest.

Three times in the last two years, the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office has made national headlines for their mistreatment of black bodies.

- ! In December of 2018 Mr. Charles Tony was beaten by detective Blake Kilpatrick while in handcuffs.
- ! In July of 2019 Mr. James Mitchell was illegally cavity searched on the side of the road by Deputy Daniel Wilkey.

Now another troubling video has been released by the District Attorney showing Reginald Arrington Jr. being beaten with batons by four Hamilton County deputies in May of 2020.

On May 23, 2020, four of your deputies beat Mr. Reginald Arrington Jr. on the roadside. Arrington, unarmed, handcuffed, immobilized by a deputy, was struck over 30 times. This horrific scene is all too familiar. As a nation and here at home, we have mourned and marched. Two days before George Floyd cried out for his mother and gasped, "I can't breathe," Reginald Arrington Jr. pleaded with the words, "Ma, they're cutting off my air!" Rather than act, you have chosen to rebuke General Pinkston for his act of transparency. Instead of demanding accountability, you have looked the other way. And this isn't the first time.

Former Deputy Wilkey was indicted on 44 criminal charges, including six counts of sexual battery, two counts of rape, and nine counts of official oppression. Additionally, he was accused in a wrongful-death lawsuit of fatally shooting an unarmed man in the head while working as a law enforcement officer in Rhea County, TN in 2014 before joining the HCSO. The man was receiving treatment at an emergency room when Wilkey killed him. Wilkey may no longer be with the department, but you have referred to him as a "good and seasoned" officer.

Deputy Blake Kilpatrick has a documented history of violence. While a Deputy in Meigs County, as reported in the December 19, 2018 edition of the Chattanooga Times Free Press, he forced his way into his then-girlfriend's home in 2006. He threatened to hurt everyone in attendance and hit her while trying to punch another man. He then refused to "comply" and leave when law enforcement intervened. Kilpatrick remains employed by the HCSO.

Four of the officers who beat Reginald Arrington Jr. have separately been involved in prior cases of alleged brutality, including two other beatings. All of these deputies remain on the force in

active duty. Just as these patterns of violence are being repeated, you are repeating the same justifications as the violation of Reginald Arrington's rights makes the news. You reference legal and coded terms like "law and order" and "justifiable force" and "due process" to uphold and justify this latest brutal beating. If it is legal and justifiable and within the Sheriff Department's guidelines to hit a man with batons who is on the ground in handcuffs, then the racist rage of your deputies is state sanctioned and points to the reality that everything that is legal isn't right. We demand law enforcement that upholds the rights of citizens, not one that systematically violates them.

These are not "isolated incidents." How many more of these videos of brutality by deputies of the Hamilton County Sheriff's Department do we need to see to recognize that this is systemic-- that there is a pattern? You deny a system of racism and bias exists in your department. You are blinded by your own privilege and racism, and racism is deeply embedded in the system you guard so dearly.

You uphold racism by highlighting the troubled history of those who are victims of your officers' brutality while hiding or overlooking the criminal history of your own deputies. You have violated your oath of office by depriving Black citizens their 14th US amendment rights through a consistent pattern of excessive force being administered to the Black citizens of Hamilton County.

All of this is enough to demand your resignation without even mentioning the mysterious crashing of the server that compromised 15 months of evidence against your officers, or the fact that Tom Morsche, Managing Director of PFM, the firm the county hired to consult on the future of the jail in 2015, said the Hamilton County jail should be "shut down." In 2012 your heart and policing strategies were revealed in your infamous quote regarding those you called "gang members" when you said, "We need to run them out of town, put them in jail or send them to the funeral home." That is your idea of "law and order." Again, this reminds us of another ungodly, militaristic, policing tactic found in the Biblical witness in Matthew chapter 2, when Herod, as an agent of an oppressive empire, commissioned the death of every male aged two years old or younger. Your attitude and inability to discipline your deputies but to instead "stand by [your] men" whenever issues arise that relate to people of color exhibits a disregard for Black life that matches that of Herod.

Reforms to curtail police brutality and harassment must be a collective endeavor between law enforcement, elected leaders and the community. Change requires good faith partners, and we believe there are many good faith partners who recognize systemic racism plagues our society and that the current police methodology is inept. We are eager to come together with all parties to ensure a more just society that honors the dignity of our Black and brown siblings. We are convinced, however, that your actions do not indicate that you are up to the task.

As Sheriff, your actions and words make evident you neither see the need nor lack the desire to improve HCSO. At the June 17 panel hosted by the Chattanooga Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, you proposed HCSO already had policies in place. You boldly stated, "There is nothing to change." We noticed you conceded that there is a problem with implementation. Further, you relinquished any responsibility and said "major changes" would not happen until more people joined the police force increasing diversity and quality of

applicants. In short, your plan is to do nothing and take no responsibility. This position is not only a failure of leadership but a dereliction of duty.

We do not expect you to heal our nation's wounds, but you are accountable for your words and decisions as the leader of the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office. And your recent actions have caused us to lose faith and confidence in your capacity to effectively and justly serve as Hamilton County's highest law enforcement officer.

As pastors and clergy from a diverse range of faith traditions and walks of life, we seek first the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness. We believe in a living hope and aspire to be a community that fully reflects God's grace and love. We yearn for a world free of the yoke of sin that too often manifests in our hearts and institutions as racism.

Justice demands that this most recent case of brutality at the hands of the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office must result in charges and convictions. It is clear at this point that you must be held accountable, and to do so requires your resignation. Only then will "Justice run down like waters and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24).

Signed,

Pastor Timothy Careathers, Westside Missionary Baptist Church
Rev. Charlotte S.N.N. Williams, Eastdale Village Community United Methodist Church
Dr. Jonathan Thomas
Rev. Dr. William Terry Ladd, III, First Baptist Church E. 8th Street
Elder Lionel Hodges, Renaissance Presbyterian Church
Pastor Wayne Johnson
Pastor Edward Thrasher
Pastor Willie Paul
Pastor Bobby Hampton
Pastor Ernest Reid
Pastor Ann Pierre
Rev. Carlos Williams
Pastor Steve Caudle
Pastor Sheila Harris

In solidarity with our Black clergy,

Pastor Elise Anderson
Rev. Laura Becker
Rev. April Berends, Rector, Grace Episcopal Church
The Rev. Claire Brown
The Rev. David Burman, Curate, Grace Episcopal Church
Pastor Jeff P. Crim, Ascension Lutheran Church

Rev. Martha L. Tucker
Rev. Brandon Gilvin, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Rev Anna Golladay
Rev. Jonathan Hyde
Rev. Clay Thomas, Rivermont Presbyterian Church
Deacon Russ Kerr
The Rev. Leyla King
Rev. Alaina Cobb, Mercy Junction
Rabbi Craig Lewis
Rev. Cathy Meyer
Rev. Jon Scott
Rev. Candace A. Worth
Rev. Tricia Dillon Thomas, Renaissance Presbyterian Church
Rev. Leroy Griffith
The Rev. Joe Woodfin
Warren Tefft
Rev. Sandra Winter
The Rev. Brad Whitaker

cc: (via electronic mail)

Hamilton County Mayor Jim Coppinger
Hamilton County Board of Commissioners
Hamilton County District Attorney General Neil Pinkston
Hamilton County Chief Deputy Austin Garrett
Governor of Tennessee Bill Lee