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Mildred Edwards, Executive Director

Sam Brownback, Governor

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Representative Gail Finney
Kansas 84th District
Kansas State Capitol
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: SB 18 Use of Body Cameras in Local Enforcement Agencies

Dear Representative Finney,

Technology and tools for effective oversight in law enforcement have long been a topic of discussion for citizens and police officials alike. In fact, the Kansas African American Affairs Commission has been working with local enforcement agencies and the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center (KLETC) to improve fair and impartial policing practices for well over five years; and along with KLETC, have hosted a fair and impartial policing academy for the past two. Despite the progress made, in an effort to combat distrust and hostility between law enforcement and the communities we serve, a State of Kansas mandate for local efforts and local leaders on the topic is still greatly needed.

Additionally, this topic is one of seven areas of recommended positive interventions derived from interviews with various police departments across the country in a report released by PolicyLink and Advancement Project as long ago as 2001, entitled Community-Centered Policing: A Force for Change.

Recommendations from the fourteen year old, above noted, report include “technology and tools for effective oversight” as an imperative for local enforcement agencies to prioritize finding resources from private, local, state, or federal entities to equip all officers with body-worn cameras to help eliminate violations and discrepancies in tactical missions, traffic stops, and any other interaction with community residents. These and other tools are recommended for use by departments to help investigate and hold officers accountable, and to help eliminate racial profiling and any other potential police misconduct due to a person’s class, religion, gender, physical or mental ability, or sexual orientation.

It is also important to note that, as the expense associated with developing a uniform data collection process in Kansas has been deemed unfeasible in the development of a statewide racial profiling bill, the use of body cameras can serve as a much needed positive step toward easing public scrutiny and suspicion in local policing practices, ultimately improving community/police relations statewide.

Other tools recommended to improve State of Kansas fair and impartial policing practices are:

1. **Ensuring Transparency and Accountability:** Local enforcement agencies are funded by the public and are accountable to the public. Therefore, police departments in our communities will not investigate themselves. Enforceable accountability measures with a proven track record will be established that ensure impartiality in instances where police brutality, racial profiling, and/or improper use of force are in question. This will include launching effective independent review boards broadly representative of the community, not just municipal interests. The actions, investigations, and publication of all relevant information, evidence, and policy

recommendations of these review boards will be transparent and enforceable. These boards will also ensure that data and summary information are properly collected and made publicly available on particular incidents, progress, and trends that relate to suspected police brutality and racial profiling over the years for the department.

2. **Investing in Fair and Impartial Policing Training:** Racial and class bias is real. Whether implicit or explicit, it influences perceptions and behaviors and can be deadly. Law enforcement personnel will be required to undergo racial bias training in addition to building skills that exemplify problem-solving strategies, conflict mediation techniques, and de-escalation tactics. Officers will become adept at being responsive to community needs and voices, and achieving consistency and continuity in engaging community while enforcing the law.

3. **Ensuring Diversity:** Police department personnel should be representative of our communities. Therefore, police departments will adopt personnel practices that result in the hiring and retention of diverse law enforcement professionals who are culturally sensitive, speak the communities' languages, and are residents of their patrolled communities. Departments will use diversity best practices established in this and other sectors, and will implement and monitor diversity hiring and retention guidelines for our local police departments to further community trust and partnerships.

4. **Proactively Engaging Communities of Color:** Too often, law enforcement personnel hold stereotypes about Black and brown youth and vice versa. Lack of familiarity breeds lack of understanding and increases opportunities for conflict. Police departments will work to deconstruct stereotypes and bias by identifying regular opportunities for constructive and quality engagement with youth and others living in the communities they serve. Departments will therefore review and implement best-practice approaches that can help engender more trust with our residents, and partner with our communities in solving and preventing problems before they occur.

5. **Rejecting Militarization:** Police will not become an occupying force in our neighborhoods. Emergencies and terrorism are real concerns for our communities, but departments will not rely on military tactics to police everyday problems. Deterring petty crime, protecting our communities, and monitoring peaceful protests will not involve military weaponry. Departments will exercise extreme caution and closely examine the need for programs that transfer military equipment into our local police departments, as they negatively impact training and the use of unnecessary force that often incites charged community reactions and violence.

6. **Examining and Implementing Good Models:** It is possible to develop police departments that respect, serve, and protect all people in our communities regardless of age, race, physical and mental ability, gender, or class. Departments will partner with other local, state, and federal entities to quickly identify and establish new policies and practices to improve policing in communities.

Addressing the challenges facing communities across the State of Kansas will require local enforcement agencies and the communities they serve to make a significant investment in the social capital necessary to foster civility and reaffirm trust. Any support that can be provided to achieve any of the above measures is highly recommended.

We thank you for your consideration and support of SB18.

Sincerely,



Mildred Edwards, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Kansas African American Affairs Commission