

July 10, 2020: Advocacy spotlight on 11 beginning steps to reform policing and tackle racial injustices

In a letter to Democratic and Republican congressional leaders in the U.S. House and Senate, AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, detailed physicians' support for the following changes, among others:

- Research into the public health consequences of violent police interactions.
- States requiring the reporting of legal-intervention deaths and law-enforcement officer homicides to public health agencies.
- For appropriate stakeholders, including law enforcement and public health communities, to define "serious injuries" for the purpose of systematically collecting data on law enforcement-related nonfatal injuries among civilians and officers.
- Law-enforcement departments and agencies having in place specific guidelines, rigorous training and an accountability system for the use of conducted electrical devices, often called tasers.
- Research into the health impacts of conducted electrical device use and development of a standardized protocol developed with the input of the medical community for the evaluation, management and post-exposure monitoring of subjects exposed to these devices.
- Increased use of body-worn cameras by law enforcement officers, as well as funding for the purchase of body-worn cameras, training for officers and technical assistance for law enforcement agencies.
- Training for law enforcement at all levels on implicit or unconscious bias and structural racism.
- School discipline policies that permit reasonable discretion and consideration of mitigating circumstances when determining punishments rather than "zero tolerance" policies that mandate out-of-school suspension, expulsion or the referral of students to the juvenile or criminal justice system.
- More research to identify programs and policies that are effective in reducing disproportionate minority contact across all decision points within the juvenile justice system.
- Reauthorizing federal programs for juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, which should include incentives for community-based alternatives for youth who pose little risk to public safety, reentry and aftercare services to prevent recidivism and policies that promote justice to reduce disparities.

The AMA also opposes "choke and sleeper holds as the use of deadly force with the potential to kill," says Dr. Madara's letter. "These are but a few of the necessary reforms to address the national disgrace of excessive use of violence against individuals who are part of minoritized and marginalized communities," Dr. Madara wrote. "We are at a critical point in our nation's reckoning with issues of police use of violence, racism and discrimination. The use of excessive police force is a communal violence that significantly drives unnecessary and costly injury, and premature morbidity and death. Police brutality and racism must not be tolerated. We urge Congress to act now on meaningful and effective policing reform legislation." Read the full story.

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