

Town of Ulysses Statement on Racial Injustice, Violence, and the Role of Local Government
Adopted 6/9/20

“There comes a time when silence is betrayal.”

“The time is always right to do what is right.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The purpose of local government is to protect the health, safety, and well-being of our residents and to serve all members of the public with equal respect and compassion.

We believe most police officers serve with honor and we are grateful for their service and sacrifice. However, when some officers attack their own residents unjustly with excessive force resulting in serious injury or death, the actions must be condemned in the strongest terms and investigated thoroughly.

Social change and progress occur only when those in power are challenged. Our country’s history of systemic racism has frustrated oppressed groups and sparked both peaceful and violent protests throughout the history of our republic. The protests help to increase awareness of societal and institutional injustice and, at times, have awakened the conscience of leaders who either reluctantly or boldly redressed the wrongs to help build a more perfect union. We are in such a time.

The violent death of George Floyd was recorded in graphic detail in Minneapolis, unlike the unrecorded shooting death of Breonna Taylor by Louisville police in her home. The events sparked outrage and protests that were a cumulative venting of past and present injustices suffered at the hands of local governments. When the residents of Minneapolis and communities around the world, including Trumansburg, gathered to express their shared pain and anger and to remind us that Black lives matter, they exercised their right of assembly and free speech to protest injustice.

When we watched other local governments refuse to listen respectfully and use overwhelming force to attack their own residents, we were both appalled and grateful that our own law enforcement agencies have acted with professionalism and restraint to treat our citizens and protesters with respect during peaceful protests.

When the government offers leadership to learn from its mistakes and deploys research to find better ways of policing, as President Obama did when he created the Task Force on 21st Century Policing¹ in wake of the violent and wrongful deaths of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray and so many others, local government leaders should listen and learn.

When organizations like Campaign Zero² the data-driven policing policies of the Obama Task Force which can reduce police violence by 72% if implemented by all local law enforcement agencies, we in local government should urge and support our own law enforcement agencies to enact those policies and practices.

When governments like the Village of Trumansburg have a leader like Police Chief Nelson who condemns police violence and pledges to “build a department culture that prioritizes community policing where every citizen, regardless of your race, gender and sexual orientation is treated with the utmost respect and care,” we should praise, thank, and support him and the Trumansburg Police Department.

When our Tompkins County Sheriff decries unnecessary violence by stating: "I'm a strong believer in police culture starts at the top and the recent murder of Mr. Floyd, that's a prime example of failed leadership. I am dedicated to creating a culture that prioritizes the building of trust and legitimacy through community policing, training, and education," we need to praise, thank, and support him.

And when the Sheriff’s Department announced its Duty to Intervene policy³ requiring deputies to try and de-escalate situations where colleagues appear unreasonably agitated when interacting with compliant people, directs deputies to get between another deputy and an individual should things get out of hand and report to supervisors unethical or excessive behavior immediately, we should praise, thank and support them.

And when our citizens and community organizations come forward to help us understand our unconscious bias and support of systemic racism we need to listen, learn, and take action.

The Ulysses Town Board is listening and we commit to the following actions:

1. We commit to learning more about our own unconscious biases and institutional racism. We will strive to recognize and undo any unintentional racism in our Town policies, practices, and norms and reduce the damaging effects by having a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination in our workplace and funded programs.
2. We further commit to urging the law enforcement agencies charged with protecting and serving our town residents to implement the 8 Can't Wait initiative, based on the Obama Task Force findings by banning chokeholds, requiring de-escalation, requiring alternatives and warnings before shooting, requiring fellow officers to intervene to prevent abuse, limiting the use of force, and requiring comprehensive reporting and accountability.
3. We further commit to seeing the value and potential in each and all of our community members, communicating respectfully across our differences, and creating more opportunities for diversity and inclusion to improve our governance and services.

References:

1 Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing 2015

https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf

2 Campaign Zero's #8 Can't Wait Strategies from the Task Force on 21st Century Policing

<https://www.joincampaignzero.org/#vision>

3 Tompkins County Sheriff's Department's Duty to Intervene Order

https://www.scribd.com/document/464202103/G-O-311-Duty-to-Intervene-TCSO#from_embed