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NASW calls for policing reforms in aftermath of shootings in Oklahoma, North Carolina

Needed reforms include national use-of-force standards, training to de-escalate tense situations

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- In what seems to be an unending national dilemma, the country is again grappling with the shooting deaths of black men during encounters with law enforcement officers.

In Tulsa, Okla. police approached a vehicle in a traffic stop-related encounter with Terrance Crutcher, 40. The officers were initially responding to a report of a stalled vehicle.

Crutcher, who was unarmed and not resisting, was shot with a stun gun by one officer and shot with a pistol by a second officer. The gunshot wound was the cause of his death. The officer who fired the fatal shot – Betty Jo Shelby – has been charged with first degree manslaughter.

Keith Lamont Scott, 43, an African American man from Charlotte, NC, also suffered fatal gunshot wounds by a policeman. The circumstances and justification for this shooting is ambiguous.

Scott was approached by police while they were seeking an arrest of another man on outstanding warrants. The Charlotte Police Department has released some video of the incident but the results are inconclusive with police saying Crutcher was armed while others say he was not threatening officers with a weapon when he was shot.

Further complicating matters is the fact Scott suffered from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and had taken medication just prior to the shooting.

The incidents involving Scott and Crutcher rekindled a national outcry and debate about racial disparities in the use of lethal force by police.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recognizes and embraces the crucial, necessary, and dangerous role that law enforcement officers play in maintaining public safety for all segments of our society. The association also recognizes that our society cannot ignore compelling evidence that men of color, especially black men, are more likely to be killed during a use-of-force encounter with police than other racial or ethnic groups.

Respecting the role of police in maintaining public safety and eliminating racial disparities in the pursuit of public safety are not mutually exclusive. With that in mind, NASW makes the following recommendations in light of these recent events:

- There is an urgent need for national standards for use of force by law enforcement agencies. There are literally thousands of separate police and sheriff departments, state police, and federal law enforcement agencies in the United States. These agencies have the legal right to use force up to and including lethal force. Yet, there are no national uniform standards, protocols or training modules for using such force.
- Law enforcement officers are far too often put into situations where they have to use de-escalation techniques with persons who are mentally disabled. It is essential that all law enforcement agencies, no matter how small, require officers receive certifications on de-escalation techniques where there are indications that the person they are encountering has a mental health or cognitive disability.
- Transparency on the part of law enforcement agencies and all levels of government related to use of force cases is critical. In cases where lethal force is used, all video and audio recording from police body cameras and dashboard cameras must be made public as soon as reasonably possible. Additionally, there must be a national standard and requirement that all law enforcement agencies (regardless of the size of the jurisdiction) collect data on all use-of-force cases that result in bodily injury or death. The data must be disaggregated for race/ethnicity, gender identity and age.
- NASW recommends the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) adhere to the Death in Custody Reporting Act of 2013 (DICRA) as intended by Congress. DICRA was enacted to ensure the accuracy of federal statistics on deaths that occur in the course of arrest or while the decedent is in custody, including in jails, prisons and juvenile facilities. The goal of the law is to understand the prevalence and causes of deaths in custody and to use this information to reduce the incidence of such deaths. NASW is a signatory of a letter sent to DOJ by the national Law Enforcement Working Group that requested that DOJ adhere to the data collection intent of Congress.

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The [National Association of Social Workers](#) (NASW), in Washington, DC, is the largest membership organization of professional social workers with 130,000 members. It promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social work and social workers. NASW also seeks to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its advocacy.

