

PRESS RELEASE

Violence Prevention Coalition (VPC)

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**Community Coalition Demands Accountability For Recent Murders Of Black Americans by police;
Denounces destruction of property, Warns of COVID19 spread**

Oakland, CA – Amidst a global pandemic and looting pandemonium, Oakland violence prevention activists say protestors looting downtown have taken the focus off what they say is the key issue: the terror of living while Black. The activists call for the immediate arrest of all officers involved in George Floyd's death. They also want justice for Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Willie McCoy, Steven Taylor and all whose lives are taken by law enforcement. But they say the looting in Oakland is not helping the cause. "We are all angry and grieving," says Oakland native Antoine Towers. "But when the news is talking more about white kids looting than the people we've lost, we've lost focus." Towers, who serves as Chair for Oakland's Violence Prevention Coalition, says the people of Oakland strongly and unequivocally denounce the shooting of two security guards were shot at the Federal Building. "There's no way our people would take the life a Black father as a means to honor Floyd's life."

Towers says the Coalition is also concerned that protestors may be spreading COVID19 in a city already hard hit by the pandemic that disproportionately impacts Oakland's Black and LatinX residents. Due to the destructive nature of recent protests and the ongoing threat of COVID-19, the Coalition urges people to stay at home and use social media platforms to express their outrage in a peaceful manner. Our priority is the safety of each and every Oakland resident. Oakland will lead by example and show the world that LoveLife is more than a motto — it is a path to healing and change.

Across the country a pattern is emerging that reveals young white men agitating violence amidst peaceful protests designed to call attention to the unjust policing. "The rage felt across the country is not just about the Floyd family. It is rooted in the fact that his death is all too familiar in communities of color. But what our people tell us is that the outside agitators destroying businesses that employ or are owned by people of color is an insult to the movement and increases trauma" says Department of Violence Prevention Chief Guillermo Cespedes.

Comprised of victims of crime, poverty and incarceration, the Violence Prevention Coalition formed several years ago to establish the Department of Violence Prevention to prioritize non-policing public health interventions to protect those the most at risk for violence-related death. Based on social media posts that claim supremacists have infiltrated peaceful protests, the volunteers are concerned that Oakland's long history of protest is being compromised to the detriment of Black families. "Black protestors are risking their lives to protest a long history of racist policies, systemic poverty, and disinvestment. It's time for structural change to American policing, which will include a zero tolerance policy for white supremacy and fair treatment of victims of crime and police brutality," says coalition volunteer Melvin Cowan.

"We are losing our lives, our businesses and jobs in the pandemic. We are most likely to be homeless, most likely to be unemployed and to die. The focus of the protest must be about these unjust realities or it's just people risking the spread of the CoronaVirus and living out riot fantasies," says Towers.

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