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CONTACT: LaToya Henry
(313) 447-6404

OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

THE DEATH OF PORTER BURKS COMPELS US ALL TO FIND A BETTER WAY!

DETROIT – The very fervent prayers and thoughts rise up from the community in the recent shooting death of Mr. Porter Burks by members of the Detroit Police Department. This most tragic death raises serious concerns about the training, strategies, and racial sensitivity by members of our police department. Detroit has in Chief James White a contemporary, well-trained, educated in mental and psychological behavior leader. He is also a licensed mental health counselor. He has served as head of the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. He is no stranger to issues involving mental health and racial sensitivity. He is well positioned to address the area of mental illness and its crisis-like explosion in cities and townships both in Detroit and around the country.

Porter Burks obviously had mental health issues. According to reports he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. While armed with an 8-inch knife, police said they asked him to “*drop it and talk about the situation,*” but he instead charged at them with the knife. As a result, he was fired upon thirty-eight times and struck at least fifteen times by five police officers. To many in the community, this appears to be extreme and an overuse of force. Fifteen bullets are a lot of bullets. No one wants a police officer to be killed or injured in the performance of their duty. They are entitled to go home. Likewise, suspects should not be killed on the streets as the police perform their duty. They too are entitled to go home or go to jail.

Mental illness is a very definite issue in our community. Recent reports even indicate that our jails and prisons have become dumping grounds for those needing treatment. It is apparent that our system is broken. It was broken initially in 1997 when Governor John Engler announced, “*the closure of Michigan’s underutilized state mental hospitals.*” He moved them from inside the clinics where they got care, to outside in the streets where we watched them simply wear the signs of hopelessness and confusion, with treatment being very rare. The necessity to deal with mental illness must be emphasized in the training and strategies utilized by the police. It is necessary for de-escalating and eliminating tragedies like this in the community. Police are trained to shoot in the area of body mass. They don’t wound or try to slow you down if they believe lives are threatened. It is here where we must do better. Is there a better way to de-escalate by the creation of more units called **Respect** or **Heart** or **Life-Preservers**, before guns are drawn? Is there a more effective way to utilize tasers, netting, or deployable portable barriers to prevent an individual’s movement? These are questions that must be answered if we are to prevent these tragedies from occurring.

Police officers encounter folks with guns and knives all the time. In most cases, death does not occur. However, it appears to occur too often when it involves Black men. There are many examples of whites with guns and knives who assault citizens and police yet live to talk about it. Such examples include Luke Oeltjenbruns in Hutchinson, Minnesota. He refused to wear a mask at a home improvement store.

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He hit an officer with a hammer, took a car with another officer holding on to it while he dragged him on the road. He was arrested. Robert Primo III of Highland Park, Illinois shot and killed seven people, wounding two dozen more. He ran from the police and ultimately surrendered. He was arrested. Nicholas Arnold Schock, a white supremacist in Florida with a huge swastika on his neck, caused a racist disruption in a restaurant threatening to sexually assault one woman and physically attacked another. Police officers arrested him and carefully placed him in the back of the car. The employees of the restaurant used more force than the police. Peter Manfredonia of Maryland killed a 62-year-old man with a machete, held another hostage, stole the hostage's guns and vehicle, killed a former classmate, and kidnapped the former classmate's girlfriend in her car in Connecticut. Police in Hartford said, *"no one was injured when he was arrested."* Roger Hedgpeth was arrested a block away from the White House after threatening to kill the President of the United States. He was armed with a sheathed knife on his left hip. He was also wearing an empty pistol holder. He told the Secret Service *"I am here to assassinate President Donald Trump. I have a knife to do it with."* He was arrested and taken into custody. There are many more cases where whites who have committed serious, violent offences have been gently brought into custody.

This is not an attack upon the Detroit Police Department. However, it is a call for all of us to understand the issues concerning mental health, the racial disparity, as we find more Black people killed and arrested, disproportionate to our population. We must acknowledge for some, even in our own community, Blacks are perceived differently, not understood as clearly, and are very rarely given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to situations like this. The community must be able to trust its police department and those charged with protecting and serving the public. We have built a good relationship with the Detroit Police Department. The lines of communication have been opened. However, we must do better. Detroit must not become like other cities where there is little trust, no communication, disrespect, and no effective communion between the community and its law enforcement departments. We have come too far to let any situation turn us back. This situation must be addressed fairly, openly, and where there are violations of protocol and extreme use of force, they must be acknowledged and dealt with. This will allow us to continue to work together. THERE MUST BE A BETTER WAY.

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