

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

June 01, 2020

RE: The tragic death of George Floyd and calls for legislative action as an act of Justice.

Dear Hon. Doug Ford,

The Justice for Abdirahman Coalition, first and foremost, would like to express its deepest condolences to the family of Mr. George Floyd. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with George Floyd's family and with the countless others who have lost their lives in such dehumanizing ways. It is truly tragic that yet another statement is needed in response to yet another tragic death of a Black man at the hands of Police.

The Coalition is besides itself. Watching the events unfold last week have brought back painful memories of Ottawa's own recent history of police brutality. We cannot help but see the striking similarities between the two deaths. Our namesake, Abdirahman Abdi was a 37-year-old Somali-Canadian with mental health issues. Abdirahman died on July 24th 2016 at the hands of Ottawa Police Officer, Daniel Montsion who was subsequently charged with manslaughter, aggravated assault, and assault with a weapon in connection with the death of Abdirahman Abdi.

Like George Floyd, Mr. Abdi had no criminal history, and there were no indications he posed a threat to the lives or safety of the officers at whose hands he died. Both violent deaths were captured on camera in broad daylight in front of many eye-witnesses. Both events saw thousands of protesters take to the streets across the country expressing pain and anger and calling for justice.

While there are similarities in these two deaths, there are striking differences in the immediate response of public officials. The key perpetrator in George Floyd's death, Officer Derek Chauvin, was arrested within days and charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter. While in the nation's capital of Canada, Abdirahman Abdi's alleged killer, remained employed without charges for approximately eight months. Today, nearly four years after Abdirahman's death, Daniel Montsion remains a free man and earns six figures paid through tax payers dollars. While Montsion was eventually charged, his criminal trial continues and is now in its second year without any conclusion.

In Ottawa, public officials hid behind grey laws and policies and claimed their hands were tied to take any decisive action on Abdirahman's death. As an advocacy group we focused our efforts on much needed legislative reforms. Following nearly two years of advocacy, we eventually made a technical submission to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy concerning a pending Bill that was set to change direction in policing that would release the shackles that officials like Police chiefs claimed stopped them from removing officers like Montsion. Bill 175, The Safer Ontario Act was voted on and passed in the Ontario legislature on March 8, 2018. It was set to come into force on June 28, 2018. Sadly this day never came as the incoming government quickly rolled back the legislation undoing

years of effort to build accountability and transparency in policing and introduced a new legislation that favoured the status quo: the Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act, ironically referred to as the “COPS” Act.

The tragic deaths of Abdirahman Abdi, George Floyd and countless others, are clear indications that systemic racism is alive on both sides of the Canada-US border. Canadian officials from local policing to provincial decision makers and federal leaders need to take a close look in the mirror before looking down at their American counterparts. They can course correct by encouraging provincial lawmakers to take immediate action to reinstate key clauses around accountability and transparency removed from the previous iteration of the policing legislation.

This would be a true act of justice and not just lip service polluting the airwaves and rolling through social media with fake claims of anti-racism and solidarity.

Established in summer of 2016, the Justice for Abdirahman Coalition is an Ottawa-based group advocating for justice for the late Abdirahman Abdi and his family. The group is supported by local and national advocacy groups and has been working to obtain greater transparency in policing, challenge racial inequity, and bring positive change in local and provincial institutions in honour of the late Abdirahman Abdi and his family.