

Residents Call for Policy Change, Regional Leaders Must Rise to the Challenge

Forward Through Ferguson co-chairs, Rebecca Bennett and Zachary Boyers, and 30 community partners call on policy and decision makers to deliver swift action on Ferguson Commission Calls to Action.

THE TIME IS NOW

Unfortunately, we've been here before.

The names of the dead are different, and the names of the officers who shot them are different, but even though many proclaimed our region would be different after #Ferguson, so much of what we are confronting right now is the same.

The anger and frustration and anguish are the same. The sense of injustice that draws people to protest in the streets is the same. The militarized police response and the over-aggressive conduct of individual officers are the same. The disagreements, the arguing, the not listening, the finger pointing, the insistence that the other side is 100% wrong—it is all the same.

We are back in this very same place because while Ferguson woke up our region, and our nation, to the brutal realities of injustice and racial inequity, **the policies that govern our region today are still the same.**

We are here because generations of segregation and unequal treatment have led to unequal outcomes, to a St. Louis that works just fine for some, but withholds the promise of the American dream from too many others.

We are here once again because we lack a shared commitment to racial equity.

We can no longer afford to treat #Ferguson as an isolated incident that would settle down as time passed so we could go back to “normal.” We cannot return to normal because the anger and frustration that boils below the surface in St. Louis will continue to erupt in our region, over and over again, unless we commit to working toward racial equity.

If we truly want to have justice for all, then we must change law enforcement practices, municipal court systems, and the policies that shape them. The appropriate response to the unrest we see in the streets is not more platitudes and sentimental acts of charity, but real work to dismantle oppressive, deadly systems and structures.

TOWARD ACTION

Two years ago, the Ferguson Commission issued its report, a landmark policy roadmap for proactively and intentionally addressing our region's racial inequity. Forward Through Ferguson (FTF), the organization charged with turning the 189 Calls to Action in that report into action, is ready to serve as a catalyst but cannot make the changes on its own.

Today, Forward Through Ferguson and our co-signing community partners call on those in the law enforcement community, the business community, and political and civic leadership to take

a stand with us to advance needed reforms on behalf of the citizens of St. Louis, and on behalf of the Black and Brown people who continue to be endangered by systemic racism.

The region needs your engagement, your leadership, your humility, your investment of time, your energy, and your serious, genuine attention to effect change. We cannot allow ego and petty differences to stop us from doing what is right for our community.

Feeding off the energy we have seen in the region over this verdict, we will redouble our efforts to bring as many people to the table as we can, and to keep them there until we can address the racial inequity that plagues our region.

To those with institutional and governmental power: we must come to the table to engage, support, implement, and do the work. We are committed to action. Collective, strategic, bold, policy-driven action. Our action can't yield different outcomes without you.

Elected officials and those with policy power:

- Leverage the Justice for All Calls to Action of the Ferguson Commission report, prioritizing the 7 urgent policy areas attached to this statement, to develop community-informed and responsive policies that can transform the way law enforcement and courts engage with citizens, especially people of color.
- Let your decisions in the coming days, weeks, and months be real and authentic responses to concerned citizens' demands and vision for a better St. Louis.

Concerned citizens, organizations, and coalitions:

- Your advocacy, protests, and voices will be the impetus for change. Persist. Remain unflinching in your advocacy.
- Develop a shared vision for true policy transformation. Let's use the Calls to Action from the report as our roadmap and engage the groups above and below in partnership while also holding them accountable.

Civic, business, and philanthropic community:

- Invest in policy and systems change solutions that address root causes. We cannot continue funding models of the past in the hope of different outcomes. Prioritizing solutions that target root causes will alleviate the challenges our region faces.
- Establish a 25-Year Racial Equity Fund to ensure regional sustainability of the work.

To reach a different outcome we must do the work necessary now to make the St. Louis region an equitable place for all of its citizens—a place where police do not “own the night,” but serve and protect as one part of a holistic, community-based approach to public safety.

We stand ready to publicly call out those who shirk their responsibility to help keep all of the citizens of our region safe. Together, we can achieve Racial Equity. Together, we can make St. Louis a region that is just for all.

Will you join us?

Rebecca Bennett
Co-Chair, Forward Through Ferguson
Founder and Principal, Emerging Wisdom

Zachary Boyers
Co-Chair, Forward Through Ferguson
Chairman & CEO, US Bancorp CDC

COMMUNITY CO-SIGNERS

Arch City Defenders | Beyond Housing | Black Leadership Roundtable | City Garden Montessori School | Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression | Community Builders Network | Crossroads College Preparatory Academy | Deaconess Foundation | Emerging Wisdom | Empower Missouri | Equal Housing Opportunity Council | EquitableSTL | *For the Sake of All* | GoodMap | Metropolitan Congregations United | Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment | Peace Economy Project | Ready By 21 St. Louis | St. Louis Association of Community Organizations | St. Louis Equal Housing and Community Reinvestment Alliance | Social Innovation St. Louis | St. Louis Renewed | St. Louis System of Care | St. Louis Young Democrats Executive Board | STL Action | Team TIF | Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis | USBancorp Community Development Company | WeStories | Youth In Need

7 POLICY AREAS FOR URGENT IMPLEMENTATION OF JUSTICE FOR ALL CALLS TO ACTION

For full language of the Calls to Action and related research, visit: forwardthroughferguson.org.

USE OF FORCE

- Revise Use of Force Policies and Training
- Establish Use of Force Database
- Eliminate Use of Militarized Weaponry

JUST USE OF FORCE INVESTIGATIONS

- Short-Term: Create Inter-Departmental Task Forces for Investigation of Use of Force
- Long-Term: Assign Missouri Highway Patrol to Investigate Use of Force

CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT

- Create Civilian Review Boards at the County Level [with subpoena power]
- Handle Serious Incidents Swiftly, Openly, and Neutrally

OFFICER WELLNESS

- Require Psychological and Bias Screenings
- Provide Mental Health Services for Officers

RESPONSE TO DEMONSTRATION

- Develop a Comprehensive Demonstration Response Plan

MUNICIPAL COURT RESPONSE TO NONVIOLENT OFFENSES

- Eliminate Incarceration for Minor Offenses
- Treat Nonviolent Offenses as Civil Violations Rather Than Criminal Cases
- Establish Alternatives to Sentencing
- Eliminate Debtors' Prison Practices

COMMUNITY POLICING

- Engage Civilians in Police Operations
- Seek Civilian Input on Police Programs and Policies
- Facilitate More Positive Police-Community Relations
- Foster Positive, Proactive Police Interactions with Youth