



NEWS RELEASE

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U. S. Commission on Civil Rights Issues Statement on Ferguson Grand Jury and State of Missouri's Decision Not to Indict Officer Wilson for Death of Michael Brown

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights by bipartisan majority vote today issued the following statement upon the completion of the work of the grand jury and the State of Missouri's decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson for the death of teenager Michael Brown.

We understand the disappointment and anger that many in Ferguson feel with regard to the decision of the grand jury not to return an indictment in the shooting death of Michael Brown. But our nation's commitment to the rule of law requires that the decision must be afforded our respect and we must abide by the decision. However, this does not mean that inquiries into the deeper issues of inequality and racial disparities raised by members of the African American community in St. Louis County and others in the aftermath of the shooting should end.

Conditions which deny individuals or groups equal protection under the law and which deny valuable opportunities for improvement are not the American way. The Commission applauds the citizens' work to educate the country about the tensions between communities and law enforcement that have long caused great loss. Although the grand jury has completed its work, the Commission encourages the continued work of citizens and community organizations to address these issues. We also note the ongoing, in-depth investigation of this matter by the Department of Justice (DOJ) regarding the issues of civil rights and police use of force is continuing. The DOJ investigation has been endorsed by this Commission.

As President Obama remarked, "In too many communities around the country, a gulf of mistrust exists between local residents and law enforcement. In too many communities, too many young men of color are left behind and seen only as objects of fear." The Commission has long championed reforms that would combat these tensions and implement more just and effective policing. In its 1981 report *Guarding the Guardians* and the 2000 update *Revisiting Guarding*

the Guardians, the Commission raised concerns about law enforcement practices that deny equal protection and opportunity under the law to minority communities. Those members called on lawmakers and civic leaders to enact reforms that increase police accountability and reduce incidents of violence or injustice. We now call on lawmakers to revisit the themes in those 1981 and 2000 reports to review the need for independent community oversight of their law enforcement entities.

Just a few days ago, the Commission's Advisory Committee in Missouri voted to investigate the issue of interactions in Missouri between law enforcement and communities of color, particularly those interactions that involve the use of force. The Committee will take testimony from police, government officials, community members and experts on community and police interactions. It intends to hear directly from Missouri residents who have been affected by police use of excessive force. It will also examine current federal legislation related to discrimination on the basis of race in the administration of justice and make recommendations regarding their findings.

We fully endorse the Missouri Advisory Committee's approach. We especially support the notion of Missourians looking into the situation within their own communities. There is nothing more valuable than neighbors seeking to improve their way of life and the way of life of their fellow citizens and communities. We look forward to the results of their investigation. The Commission and its staff will do our part to support them as they proceed.

But while we feel some sympathy with those who feel disappointment with the grand jury decision, we cannot condone the violence and looting that has occurred. At the same time, the actions of a few individuals also cannot override the constitutional rights of citizens to peaceable assembly and protest in the days ahead. We urge restraint by all parties, law enforcement and protesters. We wish to express our condolences to the family of Michael Brown.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing an annual federal civil rights enforcement report. For information about Commission's reports and meetings, visit <http://www.usccr.gov>.