



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLICE ORGANIZATIONS, INC.

Representing America's Finest

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Statement from NAPO President Mick McHale on Criticism of Police Response to the Riot at the United States Capitol

On behalf of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO), I want to recognize the dedication and service of the U.S. Capitol Police and the other state, local and federal law enforcement agencies who responded to the riot and violence at the U.S. Capitol yesterday.

We recognize and acknowledge that there are great political divides in our nation. As law enforcement officers, the first law we are sworn to uphold is the Constitution of the United States. And we strive to protect all the rights contained therein, including First Amendment rights. At the same time, mass protests regarding controversial issues present an extremely volatile situation, and the deliberate and provocative acts of a few can swiftly turn what was a relatively peaceful assembly into a dangerous and violent mob.

Officers, in fact, put their own safety at risk in protecting the legitimate First Amendment rights of protesters, even those protesters who vilify and despise the police. They also risk their own safety in restoring public order and welfare when it is threatened by violent criminals, regardless of the political motivations or beliefs of the individual persons involved.

When elected politicians seek to substitute their own judgement for that of experienced officers, regarding the dangerousness of mobs, and how swiftly a situation can spiral out of control, the result can often be greater danger to public safety, and an increase in physical harm as well as damage to property and institutions. One example of this is the removal of “tools from the toolbox” that officers may need to protect themselves and the public in riotous situations. These tools may include teargas or other irritants, less-lethal projectiles, and even items such as helmets and shields. When the legitimate availability of these tools to officers is foreclosed at the front end, the predictable result is that demonstrations that might have remained relatively peaceful, or at least less violent, quickly escalate to destructive violence.

The great harm here is that officers are sometimes placed in a situation where, having been stripped of legitimate less-forceful means of maintaining and restoring order, they find themselves approaching a situation where they are forced to choose between no force at all and deadly force, because the intermediate use-of-force tools have been restricted or prohibited. This situation clearly risks great harm, destruction and even death, that might otherwise have been prevented. In cities across the country, the dissatisfaction with police response to sometimes violent protests during the summer have led to the deliberate disengagement or “standing down” of officers and the banning of vital de-escalation tools.

The political and social atmosphere in our country is overheated right now, and it is likely that legitimate protests are at risk of being hijacked by a few bad actors. Because this is an existing and foreseeable risk, it is incumbent upon our civil leadership, both our elected officials and our law enforcement agency heads, to insist that our line officers be properly equipped and trained in the full spectrum of options available to them to maintain and restore public order.

The National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO) is a coalition of police units and associations from across the United States that serves to advance the interests of America's law enforcement officers through legislative and legal advocacy, political action, and education. Founded in 1978, NAPO now represents more than 1,000 police units and associations, and 241,000 sworn law enforcement officers.