

IVAT Statement on Racial Justice and Equity and Necessary Reforms following our Statement on the Death of Breonna Taylor

2 October 2020

IVAT works to raise awareness, educate, and increase understanding around the myriad forms of interpersonal violence and abuse of power. For 35 years, we have worked with local, national and international partners to advance best practice in these areas. Our work has been multidisciplinary with the goal of linking research, practice, policy, and advocacy to reduce and ultimately end violence. IVAT is a comprehensive resource, training and professional services center concerned with all aspects of violence, abuse, and trauma. Through a focus on key collaborations, IVAT bridges gaps to help improve current systems of care on local, national, and global levels, and to make them trauma informed. One of our programs is related to the current training we are providing on the importance of addressing trauma and wellness for Law Enforcement professionals to enhance de-escalation techniques and to reduce officer-involved shootings.

IVAT's vision is a world free from violence, abuse, and trauma. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for individuals on local, national, and international levels by sharing and disseminating vital information, improving collaborations and networking, conducting research and training, assisting with direct professional services, program evaluation, and consulting to promote violence-free living.

The IVAT statement about Breonna Taylor's death released on September 25, 2020 was intended to raise awareness around: systemic racism and other problems that far too often result in officer-involved deaths; the process by which policies, practices, and historical norms work to reinforce racial inequities in various systems of care; the need for improved officer-focused trainings as one way to address the various traumas that may correlate to officer-involved fatalities; the reforms needed across all of society's systems to improve prevention and intervention services related to interpersonal violence; the need to reduce racial disparities across all systems of care; and how racial trauma can affect people individually and collectively. The recent ban on racial sensitivity training to federal contractors illustrates one current example of the perpetuation of systemic racism.

According to the Center for Policing Equity Report on **Re-imagining Public Safety**, "Criminal justice exposure is fundamentally linked to underlying inequalities in distributions of wealth and power; it burdens the same neighborhoods that have been weighed down by inadequate

housing, failing schools, food insecurity, lead poisoning, and so on—often for generations. People must be treated with dignity and respected as citizens. To build a legitimate system we need to invest in resources that prevent people from becoming entangled in the criminal justice system, such as mental health assistance, substance abuse treatment, and public health more generally.” We agree that this should be an important area of focus.

IVAT is currently engaged in training with Law Enforcement in the state of California based on the ***More Than Surviving: From Traumatic Stress to Wellness*** curriculum which is focused on enhancing officer’s overall wellness, notably after dealing with incident responses, organizational stress, and community interactions, to reduce confrontations. The long-term goals of this course are: to 1) help officers take a proactive approach to recognizing and reducing stigma around dealing with stress; 2) increase officer safety and wellness while reducing officer and agency exposure to liability; and 3) promote trauma-informed wellness programs within the agencies. The trainings are conducted by a multidisciplinary team of law enforcement and mental health professionals. The goals are to improve law enforcement morale, provide techniques and tools to reduce trauma in themselves and their colleagues, and to be able to de-escalate situations in the community that can occur due to historical racial trauma and inequities.

Our statement about Ms. Taylor’s death was not intended to judge specific police actions but was intended to highlight the critically needed reform in not only the criminal justice system, but also in all parts of our nation’s systems that can perpetuate systemic racism and practices. These can contribute to barriers in communities and Law Enforcement working together to increase public safety. Education around historical trauma and racial disparities in all systems is critical in the midst of several concurrent national emergencies. The denial of historical and racial trauma and racism promotes and perpetuates it. We hope lessons learned from the death of Breonna Taylor, and too many others in our country, including police officers, will become catalysts to help advance the important discussions around reimagining public safety.

We acknowledge that there is often one sided or false information swirling around individual incidents of violence, and it is important to allow for investigations and disclosures of details to play out before judgements are made. Our intention was not to contribute to these inaccuracies. Our work is to educate and advocate for the intervention and prevention of violence in all its forms as noted above. IVAT condemns violence against Law Enforcement and by those rioting, as well as violence directed at peaceful protesters. We are against violent criminal activity by anyone and believe each person who engages in violent criminal activity must be held accountable.

Leadership at the community, state and national level must work together to diffuse and de-escalate the violence and prioritize safety and justice. We call for the continued work on policy changes and the investment of funds to support community programming that provide expertise and support to Law Enforcement around various community needs. An investment

of resources, time and commitment is imperative. As a recent report from the Center for Policing Equity demonstrates, “The **best evidence shows that building a strong partnership between policing agencies and the communities** they serve is the **basis of effective violence reduction strategies.**” Building a stronger partnership between the police and the community requires that we focus on how the public views the fairness of police and other state actors. As the 2015 President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing concluded, “building trust and nurturing legitimacy on both sides of the police-citizen divide is the necessary foundation of a policy strategy.”

We will continue to do our part to advocate for change around the health and equity disparities people of color and indigenous individuals experience daily. Our hope is that we learn from the situations that lead to loss of life, both of community members and Law Enforcement, so that we can reduce both the amount of violence and the abuse of power, such that the divisiveness in our communities and society that promote and inflame hatred, bias, oppression and racism ends.

Sincerely,



Sandi Capuano Morrison, MA
Chief Executive Officer
Family Violence & Sexual Assault Institute,
dba Institute on Violence, Abuse and Trauma



Robert Geffner, PhD, ABPP, ABN
Founder/President,
Family Violence & Sexual Assault Institute
dba Institute on Violence, Abuse and Trauma

Center for Policing Equity Report: **Re-imagining Public Safety: Prevent Harm and Lead with the Truth A five-step policy plan for policing in America.** Phillip Atiba Goff, Elizabeth Hinton, Tracey L. Meares, Caroline Nobo Sarnoff, Tom R. Tyler.