

Police Bias

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killed eight people over a two-and-a-half-year period from February 2019 through October 2021, marking the highest rate of deadly force by law enforcement in Washington, according to the activists.

Five of the victims were men of color, including three Black men and two men of Pacific Islander heritage – in a county where those groups together account for about 3% of the population. The remaining three victims were men experiencing homelessness as well as a mental health crisis.

In a letter asking for the federal probe, the NAACP and ACLU outline a disproportionate use of force by the local law enforcement officers against residents of color compared to their white neighbors, and details of both agencies' alleged discriminatory policing and favoritism toward known white supremacist extremist groups.

The letter points to correspondence and emails that suggest that law enforcement offices in both Vancouver and Clark County have treated Black demonstrators who protest police violence as threats, while viewing white supremacist

demonstrators as simply exercising First Amendment rights, despite a well-documented pattern of these right-wing groups inciting and committing violence locally and nationally.

In an October 2020 incident, for example, community members gathered for a peaceful vigil to honor Kevin Peterson Jr. in Hazel Dell, a Black man killed by Clark County Sheriff's Deputies a day earlier in a drug sting operation, when a hostile group of white supremacists drove trucks through the vigil and physically assaulted members of Peterson's family and supporters with bear mace, paintballs, and other threats of violence, according to the civil rights activists.

Enoka Herat, police practice and immigration counsel for the ACLU of Washington, said law enforcement failed to respond to the incident, allowing members of Patriot Prayer, the Proud Boys, and other extremist organizations to terrorize peaceful mourners. Many of those gatherers required medical assistance after the attack, the activists said.

"We come together to mourn, and we're attacked by extremists. We come together to protest inequality and we're attacked,



An archive photo from AP shows a counter protest against Black Lives Matter on Oct. 30, 2020 in Hazel Dell, Wash. on the night of a candlelight vigil for Kevin Peterson Jr., a Black man killed a day earlier in a police shooting.

and the police look the other way," said Nickeia Hunter, whose brother Carlos Hunter was shot and killed by Vancouver police in 2019. "The stress and anxiety caused by knowing there's nowhere to go and no way to stay safe wears on you."

The NAACP and ACLU leaders also said they're disturbed Vancouver Police does not direct offers to only use force that is

proportional to the threat encountered, a policy found in opposition to best practice recommendations calling for officers to consider less severe options to achieve the same outcome.

Kevin Peterson Sr., for example, joined the news conference, and questioned why officers fired shots at his son without appearing to take actions to de-escalate the confrontation. He called the loss

of his son tremendous.

The civil rights organizations are asking the DOJ to investigate under the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994.

"Federal intervention is necessary for all residents in Clark County to receive equal and fair treatment, constitutional policing, and to feel safe in their communities," Herat said.

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