

## Protesters against police brutality call for greater community control

Deseret News

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Jul 18, 2020, 10:06pm MDT

<https://www.deseret.com/utah/2020/7/18/21329809/protesters-against-police-brutality-call-for-greater-community-control>

SALT LAKE CITY — Protesters in downtown Salt Lake City Saturday evening joined a national day of protest against police brutality, demanding justice for the families of those victimized by police and calling for their cases to be reopened.

Utah Against Police Brutality hosted the event in response to the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, calling for a national day of protest against police killings, according to organizers. The rally that kicked off outside of the Utah Capitol swelled to over 100 as the evening went on, until protesters made their way to the governor's mansion.

"We are not alone. There are numerous cities in the U.S. that are protesting right now. Can we get happy about that?" said speaker Mike Ramos to a roar of cheers. "We think because we are Utah we are out here in the west and nobody cares about us and it's not like that. We are getting the attention, good or bad, of the whole United States."

A handful of counter protesters, some of whom were armed, carried American and blue lives matter flags as they walked into Saturday night's protest.

Speakers urged the crowd not to be bothered by their appearance, saying "we don't have time for all that distraction" and that security would handle things. Some of the protesters immediately engaged in conversations with the counter protesters, calling on them to stand with them and declare that Black lives do matter.

Some of the conversations became heated as crowds formed around those facing off, but they remained peaceful and in some, common ground on a few issues was reached.



*Heather, who did not provide a last name, from Patriots Prepared, and Rae Duckworth of Black Lives Matter debate outside the Capitol in Salt Lake City on Saturday, July 18, 2020. One group of protesters had met to oppose police brutality and to call for Gov. Gary Herbert to repeal HB415; they were met by a small group of counter protesters. Scott G Winterton, Deseret News*

“We have distractions, obviously, but you are going to get that when you are doing something good, when you are doing something positive, you’re always going to have opposition,” Ramos said of the counter protesters’ attendance. “But we are here for a purpose. We’re not just here for show. This isn’t a clown show, this isn’t the circus. This is really who we are.”



*Jamie, who did not provide a last name, from Patriots Prepared, and Drew Kacey debate outside the Capitol in Salt Lake City on Saturday, July 18, 2020. One group of protesters had met to oppose police brutality and to call for Gov. Gary Herbert to repeal HB415; they were met by a small group of counter protesters. Scott G Winterton, Deseret News*

Ramos, who is a a member of the Utah chapter of Black Lives Matter and Utah Against Police Brutality, said that as an African American and Hispanic man, this is his reality.

“When I say Black lives matter, it’s not just a thing on my shirt,” Ramos told protesters as the sun began to crest the top of the Capitol building. “It’s not the sign in your hands. This is my life. This is the life of my children. My beautiful Black sons.”

The group left the Capitol after about an hour and marched down the street as they made their way to the governor’s mansion to call for more community control and a repeal of HB415, legislation passed by lawmakers that blocks counties and cities from granting more power to discipline officers to outside groups such as a civilian review commission.

Also standing by during Saturday night’s protest was the ACLU of Utah Legal Observers, which issued a statement that morning about the “concerning pattern” they have noted throughout the last several months occurring at protests. “ACLU of Utah Legal Observers have directly witnessed a concerning pattern of viewpoint discrimination and disproportionate and militarized police action in response to protests and First Amendment speech that criticizes elected leaders and law enforcement in Utah,” a section of the statement reads.



*Protesters march from the Capitol to the Governor’s Mansion to call for Gov. Gary Herbert to repeal HB415 during a demonstration in Salt Lake City on Saturday, July 18, 2020. Scott G Winterton, Deseret News*

In its statement, the ACLU of Utah emphasized the importance of freedom of speech, the right to protest and the right to dissent, declaring these things are “crucial to both the creation and preservation of constitutional democracy.”

Protesting, it says, is a right protected for all under the First Amendment.

“We must also recognize that during any interaction between police officers and members of the public, particularly for (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities, an imbalance exists in which law enforcement agencies hold all the power,” the statement says.

The ACLU of Utah said law enforcement's role during protests is to maintain public safety and to facilitate protestors' rights to assemble, "not to intimidate protestors nor quell the viewpoints expressed by certain groups." The statement condemned unjust uses of violence and force against protestors, analyzing a series of events observed throughout the past months.