



Don't Shut Down Our Voices

A statement from Black Lives Matter Utah and the ACLU of Utah

Yesterday, amidst mounting criticism by community members, Mayor Mendenhall did the right thing by lifting the curfew order for Salt Lake City. And yet, we know the curfew caused harm to Black, Brown, refugee and immigrant communities who are already overpoliced and disproportionately affected by the current pandemic. More policing directly leads to more policing of Black and Brown people. The ACLU of Utah feels privileged to have heard from these communities and use our platform to reflect these facts.

The city's curfew was the wrong approach for several reasons. By picking and choosing the kinds of activities that were allowed, the curfew ended up targeting only free speech, assembly, and other protest activities. People who have cars to drive, people who feel comfortable talking to police, and people who can assume they won't be targeted by law enforcement did not consider the curfew a big deal. Residents of the predominantly white or otherwise insulated neighborhoods of Salt Lake City felt free to violate the curfew order without risk of arrest and freely enjoyed the very public spaces that the curfew forbade. We know this is not how everyone experiences a city-wide curfew.

From the moment the order came down, the fear among Black, Brown, refugee and immigrant communities was palpable. People in these communities felt the risk of leaving their homes, even for a purpose allowed under the order. The curfew was reinforced with police-state tactics such as emergency alerts and low-flying helicopters. This escalation of police power flew directly in the face of the kinds of reforms that Black and Brown voices and leaders are demanding.

The constitutional right to assemble is clearly protected by law. Exceptions to this curfew allowed people to access private businesses and drive on public streets. Ultimately, the curfew suppressed free speech. The murder of George Floyd at the hands of police sparked protests across the country focusing attention on a broken policing system that disproportionately kills people of color without consequence. Mayor Mendenhall and her administration need to listen and act upon the valid demands of Black and Brown voices across the country, instead of signaling that we need to earn back our right to raise these concerns in public spaces.

It is not enough for us to claim commitment to progress or sign pledges to action. Acknowledge that the recent curfew directly hindered the work that needs to be done. Listen to the voices of Black and Brown people. Don't shut down our voices. Here are real steps to progress from Black Lives Matter Utah as conveyed by civil rights leader Lex Scott:

- We want the Mayor to stop making statements like "I would not say that there is a problem of racism in the Salt Lake City Police Department," and realize that every person is capable of committing racially insensitive acts.
- We want the Mayor and her senior staff to attend a racial sensitivity training and implicit bias training immediately.
- We want the mayor to stop sending militarized police and the Utah National Guard to criminalize protesters and instead focus on police de-escalation.
- We want the Mayor to completely reform the Police Civilian Review Board. We want new members on the board. All members must attend an implicit bias training, police should not be allowed to sit on this board, and activists and police brutality victims should be welcome on the board. The Police Civilian Review Board should have the power to investigate and bring charges against police. Police should not be allowed to investigate themselves and find themselves innocent for police misconduct.
- We want the Mayor to work to open more polling stations and to offer transportation to the homeless to the polls on Election Day.
- We want the Mayor to immediately stop criminalizing the homeless community and to offer more shelters and services for them. We want more drug and alcohol treatment centers for people experiencing homelessness and we want them now.
- We want all charges dropped against protesters.
- We want the Mayor to order the Utah National Guard out of our streets.
- We want the Mayor to demand that the police not come out in riot gear, it incites the crowd.
- We want all officers who are accused of excessive force to be taken off of patrol immediately and fired.
- We want a new policy that states that police cannot deploy rubber bullets on protesters for exercising their right to assemble and their right to freedom of speech.
- We want an end to curfews and for curfews not to be enacted to silence protesters and people of color.
- We want the Mayor to read the Constitution of the United States of America.
- We want the Mayor to understand that she works for us. She was put into place by the people and she needs to begin working for the people and working for police reform.
- We would like the Mayor to issue an apology to the protesters for infringing upon their constitutional rights to protest police brutality.

Any questions about this letter can be directed to the leaders of Black Lives Matter Utah.

Signed,
 The ACLU of Utah
 Black Lives Matter Utah

For questions on mobilizing around these issues, contact:

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