

# BLACK LIVES MATTER LANSING

HB 4585, 4590, 4591- House Law & Justice Committee

Position: Oppose

October 3, 2017

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Black Lives Matter Lansing condemns violence against any human being and exists to ensure that every life, including Black lives, matters when confronted by police. Black Lives Matter Lansing opposes HB 4585, 4590, and 4591 as "Blue Lives Matter" bills that falsely portray peaceful protests and protesters as inciting violence rather than the true purpose of peaceful protests across the country which are a call for accountability for the police killings of civilians. Police should be distinguished from fire fighters and emergency response personnel as first responders. We acknowledge that police, fire fighters and emergency response personnel are the first to arrive in dangerous settings but police are set apart by their role in the criminal justice system for the purpose of law enforcement.

Michigan has the opportunity to lead the nation in addressing the root cause of mistrust between community and police which is police treatment of the community, particularly Black and Brown communities. There is at present a national outcry for the resignation of Col. Kriste Kibbey Etue, the highest-ranking official at the Michigan State Police for a meme in which she labeled peaceful protesters against police brutality and homicides as "degenerates." Her response that she will continue to focus on "unity at the Michigan State Police and in communities across Michigan" is disingenuous at best. For the Colonel to apologize for sharing the meme, not the belief expressed, and yet expect communities to trust that she perceives them as anything but "degenerates" is ludicrous.

Michigan should not fall in line with the states attempting to pass "Blue Lives Matter" laws with the misrepresentation that first-responders are not already protected. Attacks on first responders already carry enhanced penalties and are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Under this bill, Michigan police officers would be considered a protected class alongside vulnerable groups who face discrimination based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. There is no evidence that this legislation is necessary or will make first responders safer. There is ample evidence that police have the procedures and trainings to de-escalate encounters at a much higher rate when the civilian is not visibly identifiable as a person of color. The only people killed by police at higher rates than Black people are Native Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Blue Lives Matter bills serve one purpose only and that is to silence criticism and peaceful protest which is a 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment right afforded to all Americans. Law enforcement is already one of the most powerful and protected organizations in the nation and to attempt to pass legislation that suggests otherwise is deceitful and disrespectful to the families of the innocent people, including children and unarmed civilians, who have been killed by law enforcement officers as if their lives didn't matter and therefore are not worthy of peaceful protest. The best way for police to build trust with the community is to stop killing unarmed civilians and to take responsibility when it happens.

Police officers choose their profession and the risks associated. They were not born "blue" and can take off their uniforms and badges. Tamar Rice, a 12 year old boy murdered by police while playing alone in the park, did not choose his race, nor did LaQuan McDonald, John Crawford, Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Rekia Boyd, or Charleena Lyles who was 14 weeks pregnant and shot 7 times by police in front of her children or any of the hundreds of Americans whose lives were taken by police in recent years. The firefighters and emergency medical service personnel who are first responders in all kinds of tragic situations, including when the police have murdered an innocent child, deserve better than guilt by association in an attempt to pass a "Blue Lives Matter" law in Michigan. The residents of Michigan deserve better.

Signed,  
Rev. Melvin T. Jones  
On behalf of Black Lives Matter Lansing

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>