

# OFFICE OF THE ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTOR

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To: The Essex County Community

Once again, this week we witnessed the shooting of an unarmed black man, Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old, in Kenosha, Wisconsin. We do not know all the facts. There are many unanswered questions. We look forward to a thorough and transparent investigation that will provide more information and, ultimately, justice for Mr. Blake and his family.

Here is what we do know:

We know that Mr. Blake was shot multiple times in his back by Officer Rusten Sheskey.  
We know his three sons were in the car and witnessed the shooting.  
We know he sustained catastrophic injuries that have left him paralyzed.

We also know this shooting comes on the heels of the George Floyd homicide, the Breonna Taylor homicide and the Rayshard Brooks homicide – all police involved fatal shootings.

Policing is hard work. It's dangerous work. It's not for everyone. All those who sign up for the job and take the necessary steps to wear the badge, are tasked with an awesome duty. They have the legal power to take a life. But that power is given with the understanding that it must be used sparingly, equitably and with forethought. Remember, the vast majority of police officers throughout the country never discharge their weapon in the line of duty.

That is why these cases are so troubling. In so many of these cases, what we have witnessed are examples of officers who failed to de-escalate the situation. They failed to apply their training along with their common sense. For Floyd, Taylor and Brooks that failure resulted in the use of excessive force - deadly force.

We, in law enforcement, must do better; this includes requiring more of our colleagues.

Since I became Acting Essex County Prosecutor in September 2018 I have repeatedly and unwaveringly stated that this Office and the police agencies under our authority will be held to the highest standards. That means we will thoroughly investigate all allegations of police misconduct. We will charge and prosecute sworn law enforcement officers when the facts and evidence require us to do so and we will continue to push for such critical measures such as body worn cameras in all police departments. We do this because we believe in accountability and the rule of law.

With the exception of a few cases, we have been spared these types of atrocities here in Essex County. Without robust policies and practices, holding officers accountable, the public we are sworn to serve and protect will lose faith in the police. At this critical time, I want to reassure the public at large, especially our partners in the faith community, that ECPO must and will do everything in our power to prevent that from occurring.



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