News



A file photo of Martin Gugino, a 75-year-old protester and longtime Catholic Worker peace activist, lies on the ground after he was shoved by two Buffalo police officers June 4, 2020, during a protest against police violence against minorities. (CNS/ Reuters/Jamie Quinn)

by Catholic News Service

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The chairmen of three U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' committees have called for "better practices for formation and accountability for police" in a joint letter to all members of Congress.

"Law enforcement officers perform a great and needed service; they serve to promote justice and the common good in society," they said. "But it is clear that there have been too many failures in serving everyone, with tragic consequences."

The "terrible and unjust killing of George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks and so many more" in police custody demonstrates the urgent need for police reforms, they said. The USCCB released a copy of the letter late June 24.

"There must be better practices for formation and accountability for police, certainly in the use of lethal force, but also in patterns of discrimination and prejudice, so that real accountability can happen before more lives are lost," the bishops said.

"Across our country, indeed across the entire world, people are examining yet once more the evil of racism, both historic and present, and its devastating effects on individuals and society," they said.

The letter was signed by Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington, chairman of the Committee on Migration; and Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism.

"We stand in the long tradition — from St. Augustine, to St. Thomas Aquinas, to Dr. Martin Luther King — that claims that the purpose of law and law enforcement is the promotion of justice," they wrote. "The "only solution to the challenges of this moment," they said, is to follow the wise counsel of St. Paul VI: "If you want peace, work for justice."

The U.S. Catholic bishops, they said, "have pointed out numerous times that racism remains a problem in the criminal justice system," most recently in their 2018 pastoral letter, "Open Wide our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love."

In the Senate late June 24, Democrats blocked a vote to debate the Republicans' Justice Act on police reform introduced by Sen. Tim Scott, R-South Carolina, the only

Black Republican in the Senate. His bill would have created a national database of police use-of-force incidents, restricted police chokeholds, and set up new training procedures and commissions to study race and law enforcement.

News reports said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-California, accused Republican leaders in the Senate of "trying to get away with murder" with their police reform bill. The House was scheduled to vote June 25 on its version, which mandates sweeping changes and would hold police liable to damages in lawsuits.

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