



January 5, 2021

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Ronald J. Walsh Jr., President  
Thomas Ingles, Vice President  
AFSCME Council 82  
63 Colvin Ave.  
Albany, NY 12206

Dear Brothers Walsh and Ingles:

I am writing to follow up on the meeting we held on November 6, 2020. I appreciated hearing your perspectives on our union's work. As a union that represents nearly 90,000 public safety officers in law enforcement, corrections and emergency services, AFSCME acknowledges and respects the work and dedication of all public safety officers who put their lives at risk every day to serve and protect the public.

The bottom line is this: AFSCME rejects the false premise that we must choose between supporting public safety and supporting civil rights.

In fact, at a time when some of the loudest voices in America are calling to "defund the police," AFSCME – as only AFSCME can given our strong civil rights history – has opposed this kind of reckless sloganeering as well as proposals to cut funding for police departments. In addition, AFSCME unabashedly stands for full collective bargaining rights for public safety officers and aggressively fights attempts to roll back qualified immunity. AFSCME simply believes that public safety officers deserve the same freedom to organize and negotiate as anyone else. I reaffirmed this commitment not quietly in some backroom with only law enforcement officers present, but loudly and publicly in the pages of *USA Today* on June 9, 2020.

To be sure, there are challenges we must address in our country. As president of AFSCME, I believe in sitting at the table to tackle issues like police reform rather than simply banging on the table to ferment more division. That is what sets AFSCME apart from other unions: we do the hard work.

For example:

- AFSCME convened a workgroup of affiliate staff from across the nation, in which you have participated, who represent public safety and first responders to look at our responses to these issues. The committee's work is shared in the enclosed AFSCME toolkit.

**American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO**

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As you will see, the workgroup addressed the health and safety of front-line officers and developed core pillars that support our members at the table to address police reform. AFSCME believes communities can benefit from having police responsibilities more tightly focused on public safety rather than being asked to perform duties unrelated to public safety.

- AFSCME is the recognized leader in the fight to protect front-line members. We have made our voices heard in state legislatures and in Congress to support meaningful funding for the front lines, among the many other things necessary to save our national and local economies, since the early days of the pandemic. Notably, AFSCME successfully advocated for making COVID-19 a presumptive line-of-duty occurrence under the Public Safety Officers Benefit (PSOB) program.
- AFSCME is a leading voice on the AFL-CIO's national workgroup on police reform, ensuring that their work is consistent with the pillars of work the AFSCME workgroup has developed. And we honor those who were taken from us through our continued partnership with the National Law Enforcement Memorial and support of the First Responders Children's Foundation.

Our union is built on the foundation of solidarity, of standing up and standing together to improve our working conditions, our economic security and our future. AFSCME public safety leadership and members must continue to play a leading role in making sure that we are part of the solution to the problems that our communities face.

I look forward to our continued work together.

In solidarity,



LEE SAUNDERS  
President

LS/MS:kbm

cc: AFSCME Council 82 Executive Board  
Dan DiClemente, International Vice President  
William Lurye, Chief of Staff/Counsel  
Mike Sukal, Director, Organizing and Field Services  
James Howell, Eastern Regional Director  
John English, New York Area Field Service Director  
Brian McDonnell, Assistant Director, Political Action