

In letter, Boston police union blasts Black Lives Matter, drawing sharp rebuke

By [Danny McDonald](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 5, 2020, 8:46 p.m.



A demonstrator held a sign at a Boston College protest in 2017. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

A Boston police union is objecting to a slate of events this week put on by the Black Lives Matter movement to promote racial justice in public schools, in a letter to the local teachers union that a representative of the movement has dismissed as “racist propaganda.”

[In the Feb. 3 letter](#), Michael Leary, the president of the Boston Police Patrolmen's Association, calls Black Lives Matter an antipolice organization whose activities have the effect of making his union members less safe. He also urges Jessica Tang, the president of the Boston Teachers Union, to "reconsider the BTU's decision to support Black Lives Matter."

"Policing has always been a dangerous profession, but groups like Black Lives Matter, by inaccurately demonizing police as racists who kill innocent people, have made policing more dangerous than ever before," Leary said in the letter.

He continued, "Instead of examining the facts of specific shooting incidents, the Black Lives Matter movement oversimplifies and generalizes, leading its followers to distrust police and, in more and more cases, to do them harm." Leary did not cite specific examples, data, or studies to back such assertions in the letter.

The teachers union defended its decision on Wednesday, and Leary's letter also drew a response from a Massachusetts group of minority police officers that said it was "deeply concerned."

In a statement Wednesday night, Leary said both unions "have agreed to engage in a dialogue to discuss the matters raised in my recent letter regarding Black Lives Matter at School Week."

"I am hopeful that by working together, we can achieve a better understanding of the issues involving the safety of both the public and the police," said Leary.

The patrolmen's association has about 1,400 members, whereas BTU represents more than 10,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, and retirees. A spokesman for Boston Public Schools deferred comment to the teachers union.

In a statement, Tang said the union is proud to be taking part in the Black Lives Matter at School's national week of action that is being observed in 40 cities across the country during the first week of Black History Month.

“Through our participation, we’re demonstrating support, love, and affirmation to our Black students, families, and educators,” Tang said.

The national week of action includes events highlighting initiatives like ending zero tolerance discipline policies in schools, mandating Black history and ethnic studies in curriculum, hiring more Black educators, and funding “counselors not cops,” as well as lessons focusing on restorative justice, diversity and globalism, and Black women, among other topics.

Tang said the union also had reached out to the patrolmen’s union and hopes “to begin a dialogue regarding the true meaning and policy framework of Black Lives Matter at School Week, and we look forward to working together with them to reach a higher level of common understanding.”

Mayor Martin J. Walsh said in a statement that the city’s “teachers and administrators work hard every day to lift up all our students and make sure they have the opportunities they need to succeed.”

“Creating schools and communities where every student and voice is valued and heard is the priority of the Boston Public Schools,” he said. “We must continue to support all our students and schools.”

The teachers union hosted at least one of this week’s events, said Martin Henson, a Boston-based member of the movement.

Henson said Leary’s characterization of Black Lives Matter as an antipolice movement is simply “not true” and said the letter is detrimental to ongoing efforts to make education better for Black students.

“This person is representative of a unionized organization of people who are supposed to protect and serve, and who is speaking negatively about Black Lives Matter, a group that is advocating for the safety of Black people,” said Henson.

Henson added, “It’s a reminder in this political climate that the work of Black Lives Matter continues to be important.”

In Leary’s letter, he criticized the notion of “fund counselors not cops.”

“While more counselors may be a good idea, the idea that spending less on public safety will make our communities better or safer is ridiculous,” he said. “Imagine if the BPPA encouraged the public to ‘Fund Police Not Teachers’ – you would be insulted too.”

Thomas Nolan, a retired Boston police officer who now teaches criminology and criminal justice at Emmanuel College, said the letter “completely mischaracterizes” Black Lives Matter and includes rhetoric “that’s not based in any kind of empirical evidence.” He said there is less violence against police nowadays than there was in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s.

“This letter is garbage,” said Nolan. “It’s an embarrassment to Boston police officers.”

Eddy Chrispin, a Boston police sergeant and president of the 500-member Massachusetts Association of Minority Law Enforcement Officers, said a significant number of cops don’t view Black Lives Matter as anti-police and understand the importance of having discussions focused on social justice.

“His views don’t represent everyone in the department,” he said of Leary’s letter.

Chrispin’s association, along with the NAACP’s Boston branch, released a joint statement saying they are “deeply concerned about the letter.”

The statement said that both groups believe that “BLM is a reflection of the historical mistreatment of Black and brown people in this country, not only by law enforcement but also by a culture that has quietly undermined the value of the lives of Black and brown people.”

Black Lives Matter began in 2013 after black teenager Trayvon Martin was shot to death in Florida by one-time community watch volunteer George Zimmerman, who was later

acquitted.

The movement has grown as fatal shootings of blacks by police officers are increasingly recorded and shared on social media, sometimes as confrontations are still unfolding.

In 2016, Black Lives Matter [faced a backlash](#) from some in law enforcement following the killings of police officers in Dallas and [Baton Rouge](#), La. [In July of that year](#), more than 100 officers rallied to oppose a Black Lives Matter banner hanging outside Somerville City Hall.

But Nolan, the retired Boston police officer, did not think there was any correlation between the shootings of officers and Black Lives Matter. He said the movement is based on a “peaceful interrogation” of police practices.

Henson had similar thoughts, saying, “The conversation about Black liberation efforts to combat police brutality is not the same as the minimal amount of cop fatalities that happened during the same time.”

“They are not related,” he said.

Travis Andersen of the Globe staff contributed to this report. Material from the Associated Press was also used in this report.

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