

# CITY OF ATLANTA



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## **DON'T RUN! CAMPAIGN**

### ***Op-Editorial***

**Samuel Lee Reid, Executive Director  
Atlanta Citizen Review Oversight Board (ACRB)**

Since the announcement of the Atlanta Citizen Review Board's **DON'T RUN!** campaign, we have heard from the community expressing timeliness and support of the initiative. Locally and nationally, we have also heard from citizens expressing concern that the message places blame on the victim.

I appreciate all comments related to this very important topic. I believe in respectful dialogue and the value of push back as a way to find common ground, solutions, and action.

First, let me say, the **DON'T RUN!** campaign is not an indictment against citizens. I am perplexed and troubled that some citizens believe that this message focuses on the blaming of citizens as opposed to focusing on officer actions is harmful to citizens. The nation is in the grip of a debate on what to do about officer-involved deaths of innocent citizens. The Atlanta Citizen Review Board (ACRB) is not concerned with all the talking and planning, and more talking that usually results in minor changes for appearances sake. While we are engaged in the work of officer accountability and press for strict enforcement of policies and the laws that officers violate, we are concerned with reducing the ability of officers to use running as an opportunity to harm citizens. The perception that this message is in some way blaming the victim discounts the reality of citizens who run when encountering law enforcement. The debate of innocence, guilt, and the need for lawful police action is a mute argument for the dead and the injured and the families and loved ones of a citizen that has been killed or injured because of running.

Not running is not about blind compliance. It's about standing firm and asserting a demand to have your constitutional rights respected by law enforcement, to demand that an officer treat you professionally, and, if the officer does not treat you professionally, exercising your right to file a complaint and demand redress. This is far from compliance to illegal actions. Over the past two years, the ACRB has been committed to informing citizens of their rights and encouraging citizens to file complaints about police misconduct.

The ACRB takes its entire mission seriously and pushes on all fronts for accountability. We are here to serve the citizens of Atlanta; however, we understand that we cannot do it alone. With that in mind, we encourage organizations and individuals to rise up at every meeting to express their concerns about officer accountability. We encourage citizens to attend our meetings and city council meetings. We encourage citizens to file complaints about concerns they have about officer actions and remain engaged in the process and demand results from the agency, from the police department and from the elected officials.

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I have been doing this work for nearly ten years. I have seen how the results of innocent action while running (*pulling up pants, holding cell phone in pocket or hand or just empty hands*) end in death and injury. We have interviewed citizens, bruised and battered, who later realize that it wasn't worth running because they were scared or because they had a bag of weed or because they just thought they could get away. I have yet to encounter a citizen who said, "I ran because I have a right to run and I was innocent, so I ran." For that bruised and battered citizen, the realization that comes while lying on the hospital bed is that he or she could have handled the situation differently. We must stop making it so easy for officers and departments to give reasons for use of force against citizens.

A couple of years ago, I had a conversation with a police officer who stated that citizens can run from police and that saying *don't run* from police may infringe on a citizen's rights. It was an interesting conversation because under the certain perceived circumstances that same officer could use force to stop the fleeing person. Until society comes to grips with the fact that there needs to be greater accountability, we should strongly take a common sense approach to save lives and prevent injuries.

Our message is not only **DON'T RUN!** but to also "**REPORT POLICE MISCONDUCT.**" We are encouraging citizens to stand in the face of their fears and the consequences and use the processes in place to fight police misconduct. Take action. File a complaint. Follow the process. Demand that the agencies responsible for officer accountability deliver justice.

Our message, **DON'T RUN!** is not a guarantee that the officer intent on causing harm will not harm you. Our message is don't give the officer an opportunity to use your innocent action as a reason to kill or injure you.

We cannot wait until a critical incident, the death of another unarmed citizen, to demonstrate our frustration with the level of officer accountability. We must take action now. The ACRB proposes the first action is to resist the urge to run and to report police misconduct. This is not about whether a person is guilty or innocent. This is not about the responsibility of officers to act according to the law. This is about saving lives and preventing injuries. This is about documenting your interaction with a police officer.

We **CAN'T** wait to demonstrate in the streets after the death of another citizen. We **CAN'T** wait for the police departments to change their culture and practices, and we **CAN'T** wait for elected officials to demand officer accountability with the same vigor that they demand reduced crime rates. We **MUST** take control of our situations and not provide reasons, excuses, or justifications for the killing and injuries of citizens.



Please join us as we kick-off this important campaign and press conference, Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 p.m. on the steps of the Atlanta City Hall, 68 Mitchell Street, SW, downtown Atlanta.

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