



August 7, 2020

Palo Alto City Council  
City of Palo Alto  
250 Hamilton Avenue  
Palo Alto CA 94301

**Re: Black Lives Matter Mural Depicting Assata Shakur, Convicted Killer of New Jersey Police Officer Werner Foerster on May 2, 1973**

Dear Mayor Fine and Honorable Members of the Palo Alto City Council,

I am writing today to express deep concern about the Black Lives Matter mural that the City has commissioned, which includes an image of Assata Shakur – a prior Black Liberation Army member, fugitive and convicted killer of New Jersey police officer Werner Foerster. I urge you to work together with the leaders from Palo Alto’s law enforcement community as well as the artist commissioned to paint the mural to find a solution.

We must do more to recognize and address the disproportionate impact of systemic racism on Black people in this country. As the weeks turn to months since we all witnessed the death of George Floyd, we share the righteous anger felt by members of our communities who are rightly calling for change. It is incumbent upon our elected leaders to help channel that anger into a thoughtful and productive dialogue that will help to restore the trust between peace officers and those we have sworn to serve.

The inclusion of Assata Shakur’s image and quote in the mural is counter-productive to restoring that trust. While we applaud the Council’s efforts to help address race and equity issues in the City and understand that this mural is part of a larger workplan focusing on racial justice, the resulting dialogue taking place in the local Palo Alto community and beyond is growing the divide and mistrust between local officers and Palo Altans. An outcome that I believe we can all agree is not in the best interest of the City or the community.

Regardless of whether the mural is protected free speech or creating a hostile work environment for your officers, to commit to a course of inaction would squander an opportunity to bridge that divide. Palo Alto’s peace officers are your constituents, friends, and neighbors. They are an integral part of the City and are not immune from the very real psychological and emotional impacts of seeing an image every day that, whether you agree with it or not, can make them feel unwelcome and unwanted. Championing the Black Lives Matter movement and restoring trust in law enforcement are not mutually exclusive – in fact, the two objectives must go hand-in-hand. We can and must do both.

*Brian R. Marvel*  
*President*

*Damon Kurtz*  
*Vice President*

*Timothy Davis*  
*Treasurer*

*Randy Beintema*  
*Secretary*



**On behalf of the Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC) – the largest statewide law enforcement organization in California representing over 77,000 officers throughout the state – I urge you to work collaboratively with your partners in the law enforcement community to find a solution that honors their service to Palo Alto while supporting and addressing the impact of racial injustice on the Black community.**

Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing this letter, and for your commitment to addressing issues of race and equity in Palo Alto.

Very Truly Yours,  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
Peace Officers Research Association of California

Brian R. Marvel  
President

cc: Board of Directors  
Tony Becker, President, Palo Alto POA  
Sean Pritchard, President, PORAC Central Coast Chapter

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