



New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Working for a World Without Violence.

New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault • 28 Essex Street, Albany, NY 12206 • 518-482-4222

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NYSCASA Condemns Albany Police Department's Violent Response to South Station Protest on April 22, 2021

The New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NYSCASA) is committed to ending not only sexual violence, but also oppression in all of its forms, including racist and state-sanctioned violence. NYSCASA joins community members in condemning the Albany Police Department's recent aggressive and violent acts towards protesters calling for an end to police violence against Black and Brown New Yorkers.

This statement echoes many of the statements previously shared by NYSCASA and our neighbors in Albany. Community members have repeatedly called for policy and structural change to end anti-Black policing in our city, an acknowledgment of collective trauma experienced by Black and Brown community members, and an end to the Albany Police Department's use of excessive force against protesters. City officials have repeatedly ignored these calls, choosing to pit community members against each other and spreading misinformation about APD's actions.

On April 14, 2021, during a protest outside Albany's South Station, members of the Albany Police Department chose violence, instead of employing the de-escalation tactics in which they have been trained. We witnessed one officer injure a Black woman with a megaphone that he ripped from her hands. We witnessed other officers pushing and shoving people who tried to assist her. We witnessed officers indiscriminately using pepper spray on the crowd, including a 14-year-old. Then we witnessed Albany PD and City leadership attempt to justify the officers' use of excessive force by falsely claiming that this protest was a so-called "riot."

In the days that followed, protesters called for the firing of specific officers, setting up an encampment outside the South Station and promised to stay until their demands were met. Protesters also requested a meeting with APD Chief Eric Hawkins and Mayor Kathy Sheehan as an opportunity to de-escalate the situation. During the six-day

encampment, both Chief Hawkins and Mayor Sheehan assured the protesters, through a liaison, that there would be no forceful removal of protesters.

On April 22, 2021, APD gave protesters fifteen minutes to remove their tents and vacate the area. Shortly thereafter, dozens of police officers appeared, carrying batons, riot shields, and zip ties intended to be used against protesters exercising their constitutional right to protest. Members of the press and community members have shared that many officers had covered their badges with tape in order to evade accountability. Constituents are unable to file complaints about officer misconduct because we are unable to identify the officer(s) in question.

Press footage and social media videos show officers destroying tents and personal belongings as they marched forward in ten-foot intervals, pushing protesters down with riot shields, hitting protesters with batons, and dragging protesters through the street. We witnessed APD officers inciting further violence against our communities. Many of the protesters who were targeted were Black and Brown community members. Eight protesters were arrested, and one was hospitalized.

When the officers of the Albany Police Department had opportunities to practice de-escalation strategies in which they have been trained, APD has repeatedly chosen violence. Further, APD Chief Hawkins and Mayor Sheehan have continued to spread misinformation about these incidents, claiming that APD acted to ensure the safety of protesters and the neighboring community. Moreover, APD officers who concealed their identification while wielding excessive force have made it nearly impossible for community members to seek accountability from the city.

During an Albany Common Council meeting on April 28, 2021, APD Chief Hawkins defended officers' decision to hide their identities by citing reported fears of violence. Specifically, Chief Hawkins claimed that officers felt that their "wives and children would be raped," while offering no evidence to support this claim. No such threats have been found on any recordings from the April 22 incident. To be clear, threats of sexual violence are never acceptable. At the same time, people in power have long employed a racist narrative that stereotypes Black people as sexual predators in order to justify violence against Black communities. We believe that Chief Hawkins is drawing on this narrative and fear of rape from Black activists to defend APD officers' efforts to conceal their identities as they assaulted protesters.

As experts on trauma, NYSCASA is concerned about how the actions of law enforcement and city leaders will continue to traumatize communities that are already

targeted by anti-Black policing in Albany. In order to begin processes of accountability and healing, we call on the Albany Common Council to step up and lead the police reform process with input from the community, and we call on Mayor Sheehan to meet with the protesters as they requested to resolve their grievances.

We continue to invite city leadership to commit to the following:

- Stop using excessive force against protesters and stop poisoning our communities with chemical weapons, such as pepper spray and tear gas. Instead, require the widespread use of de-escalation tactics to prevent harm. If officers are not trained in de-escalation techniques, train them. If officers still choose to escalate, fire them.
- Increase consequences and liability for officers who engage in violence and misconduct. This includes investigating and holding accountable all officers who conceal their identity while wielding excessive force.
- Acknowledge the historical trauma behind the grief and anger that our communities are expressing, and take action to prevent further traumatizing people who have experienced the trauma of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and policing and criminalization.
- Refrain from using language that distinguishes between “nonviolent” and “violent” protests. This only serves to divide and villainize our communities, especially Black communities of color, when we must stand together in the face of anti-Black, racist violence.
- Respond to protests and grievances with policy and structural change, not with increased policing and surveillance. Shift resources away from law enforcement and toward non-police interventions that promote accountability and safe, healthy communities. Reduce the size of the police force and spending on militarization. Instead invest in the healthcare, housing, education, and other resources that our communities need and that increase safety and prevent violence.

We call on city officials to demonstrate transformational leadership in this critical moment. You have the opportunity to take actions that promote accountability and healing. What will your legacy be?