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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NACOLE RESPONSE TO SHOOTING DEATH OF WALTER SCOTT IN NORTH CHARLESTON, SC

April 12, 2015 – Last week the nation witnessed the tragic shooting death of Walter Scott by a North Charleston, South Carolina police officer. Shortly after the Mayor and Chief of Police watched a bystander’s video of the shooting, the involved officer, Michael Slager, was fired, arrested, and charged with murder. North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey and Police Chief Eddie Driggers are to be commended for their swift and decisive action. As we witnessed in Ferguson, Missouri, a single officer-involved shooting has the potential to shake the public’s confidence in the police, not only in the community where the incident occurred, but also throughout communities across the country.

Following the shooting death of Walter Scott, National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE) President Brian Buchner sent correspondence to officials in North Charleston urging them to consider establishing civilian oversight of its police force. As with other recent incidents, NACOLE also offered its support and expertise to assist North Charleston as it works to rebuild the essential relationship between the North Charleston Police Department and the community it serves.

There is no denying that another police killing of an unarmed black man – this one on video for the nation to see – brings into sharp focus the need for greater scrutiny of police conduct, training, policies, and technology and meaningful strategies to address the tenuous relationship between police and the black community. In part that begins by acknowledging some hard truths: 1) black people in this country have different experiences with police, and those experiences are valid; 2) police departments are not immune to bad apples or broken systems that contribute to a lack of accountability; and 3) there is a real need for independent oversight of the police, in North Charleston and across the nation. The recent report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing made recommendations in each of these areas.

The intersection of race and policing is central to the history of civilian oversight, as well as to NACOLE. Race and issues of fairness, equality, justice, and trust in law enforcement have had a prominent role in much of our work over the last 50 years. Thus, the oversight community – and NACOLE specifically – recognizes that we have an important role to play and an obligation to identify and address discriminatory practices by the police.

Time and again, cities everywhere have found themselves scrambling to establish civilian oversight in the wake of a crisis. This scenario is playing out with increasing frequency as cell phone video, websites like YouTube, and the 24-hour news cycle become even more ubiquitous than they already are. More and more, the public is demanding independent oversight to hold police departments and officers accountable. Experience has shown that oversight helps build legitimacy and public trust, through increased police transparency and responsiveness to the public served. Civilian oversight alone is not sufficient to gain legitimacy; without it, however, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the police to maintain the public’s trust.

About NACOLE

Established 1995, NACOLE is a non-profit organization that works to enhance accountability and transparency in policing and build community trust through civilian oversight. To further our mission, we hold an annual conference that brings together the growing community of civilian oversight practitioners, law enforcement officials, journalists, elected officials, students, community members, and others to meet and exchange information and ideas about issues facing civilian oversight and law enforcement.

In addition to the annual conference, NACOLE publishes a regular newsletter, hosts an e-mail listserv, conducts regional training, offers a professional credential in the practice of oversight, administers a professional mentoring program for newer oversight practitioners, and provides assistance to communities looking to develop a new civilian oversight process or review their existing one. More information about NACOLE can be found on our website, www.nacole.org.

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