

“Social justice should be the underlying goal of all humanity.”

-Alan V. Lowenstein, Institute Founder



NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Board of Trustees

Douglas S. Eakeley, Esq.

Chair

Paulette Brown, Esq.

Vice Chair

Kenneth Y. Tanji

Treasurer

B. John Pendleton, Jr., Esq.

Secretary

Ryan P. Haygood, Esq.

President & CEO

Elise C. Boddie, Esq.

John J. Farmer, Jr., Esq.

Paul J. Fishman, Esq.

Michael D. Francis, Esq.

Jerome C. Harris, Jr.

Rev. Timothy Adkins-Jones

Sandra King

Robin A. Lenhardt, Esq.

John H. Lowenstein, Ph.D.

Diana DeJesus-Medina

James McQueeney

Patricia Nachtigal, Esq.

Darrell K. Terry, Sr.

Martin Vergara II

Nina Mitchell Wells, Esq.

Antoinette Ellis-Williams, Ph.D.

Gary M. Wingens, Esq.

Zulima V. Farber, Esq. (*Emerita*)

Roger A. Lowenstein, Esq. (*Emeritus*)

Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Esq. (*Emeritus*)

Founders

Alan V. and Amy Lowenstein*

Founding Board President

Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, Esq.*

Founding Board Vice President

Hon. Dickinson R. Debevoise*

*deceased

60 Park Place, Suite 511

Newark, NJ 07102-5504

ph. (973) 624-9400

fax (973) 624-0704

email: justice@njisj.org

www.njisj.org

do social justice.

May 20, 2021

Yannick Wood, Esq.

Director of Criminal Justice Reform

New Jersey Institute for Social Justice

60 Park Place, Suite 511

Newark, NJ 07102

The Honorable Linda Greenstein

Chair of Senate Law and Public Safety Committee

1249 South River Rd.

Suite 105

Cranbury, NJ 08512

**TESTIMONY FROM THE NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL
JUSTICE IN OPPOSITION OF S2562/A4263**

Good Morning Chair Greenstein, Vice Chair Cryan, and members of this Committee.

My name is Yannick Wood. I am the Director of Criminal Justice Reform at the New Jersey Institute of Social Justice. Our Institute's advocacy empowers people of color by building reparative systems that create wealth, transform justice and harness democratic power—from the ground up—in New Jersey.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to S2562/A4263 which legitimizes the police use of chokeholds as deadly force and to voice my support instead for George Floyd's Law, S2617, which is a complete ban and criminalization of police chokeholds.

Last night, I had a difficult conversation with Gwen Carr, who is the mother of Eric Garner who was killed after being strangled by a police officer. It was heartbreaking telling her that despite her son's tragedy, New Jersey's legislature was choosing to legitimize rather than ban police chokeholds. And now as we approach the anniversary of George Floyd's murder, we cannot forget the horror of witnessing yet another black man being strangled to death by a police officer. Chokeholds are tortuous and deadly and have no place in a just and humane society. New York State's legislature agreed and passed the Eric Garner bill that bans and criminalizes chokeholds.¹ New Jersey must do the same. We must ban chokeholds and not categorize them.

Chokeholds are ineffective. When an officer applies a chokehold, the other party will struggle to breathe, and that struggle will cause the officer to

continue to choke them creating a cycle of escalation which may result in serious injury or death.

And, chokeholds are unnecessary. Officers already have tactics to subdue individuals during arrests. They can deescalate. They can coordinate a response. They can request backup. They can do what they should be trained to do to ensure that everyone walks out of the situation alive. I encourage all of you to read the Office of the Public Defender's written testimony which highlights that most of the nation's largest police departments have banned or restricted chokeholds.

Given these reasons, why then would we act to legitimize the very practice that we should condemn? A vote to support this bill is a vote to support the use of chokeholds as a law enforcement tactic. A vote to support this bill makes it the official policy of our state that it is acceptable to use chokeholds. A vote to support this bill means that George Floyd may soon be joined by others who will die at the hands of this brutal police tactic.

We refuse to believe that is what the Legislature wants. Please vote against this measure. Instead, please create meaningful police accountability by supporting the George Floyd Bill, S2617, which bans and criminalizes chokeholds.

¹ S6670B, 2019-2020 Leg. Sess. (NY.2020).