



Graduate and Professional Student Senate
 (GPSS)
 25 Graduate Life Center (0186)
 Blacksburg, VA 24061
 Email: gsa@vt.edu
gsa.vt.edu



**Graduate and Professional Student Senate
 GPSS Resolution 2021-22L
 Resolution to Defund Virginia Tech Campus Police**

First Reading by GPSS:	Sept. 23rd, 2021
Second Reading by GPSS:	date
First Reading by Commission	date
Staff Senate Review:	date
Faculty Senate Review:	date
Undergraduate Student Senate Review:	date
Approved by Commission	date
First Reading by University Council:	date
Approved by University Council:	date
Approval by University President:	date
Approved by Board of Visitors:	date
Effective:	upon approval

WHEREAS, campus police across the nation and in our local community are complicit in institutional racism through discriminatory practices that have caused direct harm to students and community members, as shown in Appendix 1 and GPSS 2021-2022D1; and

WHEREAS, the 2020 Black Lives Matter protest in Blacksburg raised many concerns about both the campus and town police, including story sharing about experiences of police brutality from both campus and town police; and

WHEREAS, prior to and within the senate meeting, many graduate students shared their experiences of police brutality from campus police specifically (see Appendix 1 for anonymized accounts), which show that national trends of police violence extends onto Virginia Tech’s campus; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech administrators have acknowledged that police murders are “race-driven,” have affirmed the Black Lives Matter movement, and called for action, as shown in Appendix 2; and

WHEREAS, the Black Lives Matter movement has called for defunding the police for seven years; furthermore, policing experts have called for abolition of or defunding of campus police departments, as shown in Appendix 1 and 3; and

WHEREAS, many people have claimed that “there are multiple interpretations of defund the police” because Black Lives Matter is a decentralized movement and thus prone to these sorts of imprecise claims about their demand. We hold up the demand to defund the police as being one in a long history of abolitionist organizing and specifically today as prison-industrial-complex abolitionist organizing as demonstrated by the 8toAbolition platform as well as long-time black feminist organizers such as Mariame Kaba, Charlene Carruthers, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis, Tamara K. Nopper, Joy James and many more activists who form the intellectual backdrop and historical present, as recognized by BLM and Movement for Black Lives organizers, for the demand to defund the police (many of these figures are cited in Appendix 1 and specific definitions of what defund the police is and is not can be found in Appendix 2). While this demand is necessarily more complicated than the one-size-fits-all style of “justice” emblematic of policing--and thus we encourage people to read the plethora of resources available in this resolution--the main thrust of defunding the police is to reallocate police funding towards preventative measures that are tailored to specific community needs, rather than criminalize people uniformly after violence has already occurred in ways that actively harm the community, do not reduce violence from occurring, and perpetuate deeply rooted racism; and

WHEREAS, to offer some historical context, Black Lives Matter, as well as local groups that have taken up their demand, such as Abolition at Virginia Tech, note that defunding the police is a matter of closing the 13th amendment loophole, the constitutional provision banning slavery except in matters of policing, which is not actually banning slavery; and

WHEREAS, Black Lives Matter activists contextualize modern day policing with its American origins as slave catching patrols under the Fugitive Slave Act as well as under the British context as union-busting pinkertons. They have traced these origins through other prominent examples of historical racism such as segregation, Jim Crow, and finally our modern system of mass incarceration supported by the 13th amendment loophole; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has specific historical ties to enslavement and has benefited from it directly as a land-grant university in the first and one of the largest slave trading states with its particular military history, as evidenced by the Smithfield Plantation site, historical work on the region by the Christiansburg institute, and contributions from local historians; and

WHEREAS, if the university and community affirms Black Lives Matter then it stands to reason they ought to support the single, solitary demand made by the movement; and

WHEREAS, section 23.1-809 of the Virginia State Code says that boards *may* establish a campus police force, but does not require a campus police force or establish the extent to which police presence is required; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that a new task force will be created by Spring 2022 dedicated to defunding campus police and reallocating those funds towards valuable social services and overpoliced communities. This task force will issue ongoing recommendations to

the university (made publicly available and widely publicized) as it proceeds and will conclude by 2026-2027 to issue a final report with a pathway to fully abolish the campus police. The stakeholder portion (GPSS 2021-2022A) will consist of Virginia Tech students and graduate students from overpoliced populations, activists from Abolition at VT, BLM activists, and critical scholars of policing; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the reallocation of funds will (1) respond directly to local community needs upon investigation by the task force and (2) work with EHS and campus medical services to ensure that they have the resources necessary to serve remote laboratories and other workplaces fully that are currently only served by campus police; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that failure to convene this task force within six months of the passing of the resolution by university council will result in the immediate dissolution of the campus police with their financial resources distributed to the Cultural and Community Centers and Cook counseling services and their equipment disposed of or sold at auction.

Appendix 1: Local Examples of Police Violence and Additional Resources

In 2019, Radford University campus police arrested freshman Aris Lobo-Perez. At the time of his arrest, he was heavily intoxicated and clearly needed medical assistance. But rather than take him to the hospital, campus police took him to the New River Valley Regional Jail where he died in a cell.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/a-college-freshman-was-found-dead-in-a-va-jail-cell-now-investigators-know-why/2019/12/17/5e0117ac-20ee-11ea-a153-dce4b94e4249_story.html

This is one example of how campus policing has impacted the New River Valley community.

Additionally, many local examples of police brutality came up during the first reading of this resolution. More local examples can be found in letters of support written for the resolution from graduate students as well as from the minutes of the meeting where people shared their experiences. Both resources were compiled into one document, here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MHqv2Ujzx4SoB8_SfMfmLjLZYryJC1gc5d18_qF4e8/edit?usp=sharing

Moreover, these local encounters parallel the larger issues with policing as noted by scholars of policing. Some additional resources can be found here:

- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016)
- Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, eds., *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter* (London ; New York: Verso, 2016)
- INCITE!, ed., *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016)

- Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, ed. Tamara K. Nopper, 2021
- Eric Stanley and Nat Smith, eds., *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, Expanded second edition (Oakland, Calif. Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015)
- Liat Ben-Moshe and Allison C. Carey, eds., *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006)
- Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
- Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016)
- Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014)
- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Tenth anniversary edition (New York London: The New Press, 2020).
- Berger, Dan. *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era*, 2016. <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781469618258>.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. American Crossroads 21. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- James, Joy, ed. *The New Abolitionists: (Neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*. SUNY Series, Philosophy and Race. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. *The Long Emancipation: Moving toward Black Freedom*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.

The shift towards defunding the police is both complicated and oftentimes emotionally difficult to get past initial opposition because of the prevalence of policing media. So, the senate strongly encourages engagement with some or all of these materials to better understand how safety and wellbeing for all communities can be better served by this policy change. The above list is just a small sample of the scholarly work demonstrating the efficacy of the policy recommendations made in this resolution and if additional resources or more specific resources are requested they can be provided as needed by contacting the senate.

Appendix 2: Virginia Tech Statement on Police Violence

In this statement from 2020, President Tim Sands and Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity Menah Pratt-Clarke refer to the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd as “race-driven.” Further, they write “So what do we do? What actions can we take? While there is a place for protests, we must do more than protest. **We have an opportunity as individuals and in our own communities to construct a microcosm of the society in which we wish to live.**” [Emphasis added]

Link: <https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2020/05/president-inclusivevt-statement-may31.html> and see, also, GPSS Resolution 2021-2022N2 for more statements in support.

This microcosm is exemplified by resources like the 8toAbolition platform that creates a pathway for defunding the police in line with BLM's demands: <https://www.8toabolition.com/>

Furthermore, in response to demands to defund the police some administrators and community members have feigned confusion over what this actually entails. We recommend the following articles and texts for (brief) clarity on why defunding the police is a historically grounded pathway for abolishing the police:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html>
- <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/06/19/the-case-for-abolition>
- <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/defund-the-police>
- https://www.democracynow.org/2020/7/3/angela_davis_on_abolition_calls_to
- Marc Lamont Hill. 2020. *We Still Here: Pandemic, Policing, Protest, and Possibility*. Haymarket Books, Chicago: Illinois.
- Vitale, Alex S. *The End of Policing*. London ; New York: Verso, 2017.
- Schenwar, Maya, Victoria Law, and Michelle Alexander. *Prison by Any Other Name: The Harmful Consequences of Popular Reforms*, 2021.

Appendix 3: Evidence for Campus Police Abolition Specifically

In this 2021 article, Dr. Davarian L. Baldwin provides evidence for why we should abolish campus police. Dr. Baldwin explains that most campus police officers carry guns and have off-campus jurisdiction, and he points to examples of officers killing and injuring students. In response to opposition to abolition in the name of student safety, Dr. Baldwin explains that despite heavy campus police presence, students are still sexually assaulted.

https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-we-should-abolish-campus-police?bc_nonce=ozj1ez8a23i3rvxsb7rxbj&cid=reg_wall_signup&cid2=gen_login_refresh

This work is part of a long line of scholars critical of policing on campuses that you can also see in the Appendices of GPSS 2021-2022D1 and the above resources. In particular, the 8toAbolition platform illustrates a clear pathway towards defunding the campus police (<https://www.8toabolition.com/>) Furthermore, the demand to defund entails a necessary second demand to redirect that money towards the local community good. This is a particularly important point given our motto of *ut prosim*, which is a statement of service with the end goal of ensuring everyone's needs are met and supported.

There is also particular local pressures to defund the police given the connections between Virginia Tech and Virginia's larger history of enslavement and displacement of indigenous peoples. This relationship has been captured by local historians as well as the Smithfield Plantation historical preservation project and the Christiansburg Institute.