

Green Mountain Self-Advocates Speaks Out Against Police Brutality June 2020

Green Mountain Self-Advocates (GMSA) is a disability rights organization in Vermont. Our leaders and members are people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. GMSA makes statements when we see something wrong in the world. On June 1, 2020, our board talked about “police brutality.” This has been a real issue in the lives of Black and Brown people for years. We support the non-violent protesters demanding justice. We will keep taking the time to discuss it amongst ourselves. We will keep working to understand and address racism in our own organization and our communities.

We began with a discussion on what is police brutality...

- When police treat people unfairly or use excessive force on someone. Like when police killed George Floyd, a Black man from Minneapolis, by kneeling on his neck for 8 minutes. Like if someone is just sitting in their car and police drag them out of the car and do not give them a chance to get out. That is police brutality. It is when police use their badge or authority to hurt somebody. And usually it is caused by racism or sometimes it could be disability. We do not know why the police think it’s okay to attack someone.
- Police brutality is when the aggression level of police officers far exceeds what is called for. And it is not just due to prejudice against someone due to race, ethnicity, or disability but it may also be against people who are in poverty. The police know that our voices will not be heard. Police are not held accountable and they take advantage of the situation. It happens all the time!

- Yes, we know sometimes police do help people. What we are trying to say is that there are a lot of police who do the opposite. We can no longer bury the facts. We want it to be known that police brutality is real, and it is not okay.

Here is what the GMSA board is saying about police brutality...

- We have a voice. We are saying loud and clear that police brutality must not happen in our country. It is not ok to kill someone.
- We need to listen to the people speaking up against police brutality. For years, people of color have been tortured and murdered by police for no reason.
- We are not feeling hopeful. The reality is that police brutality keeps happening. In order to stop it from being widespread like it is, police must be held more accountable! They should not have an automatic defense on their side because they are police officers. They must be held responsible for their actions just like you and me.
- Police are supposed to protect you and you are supposed to be able to trust them. They cannot be killing Black and Brown people. It is depressing when we live in a world where we fear law enforcement. How can we live in a world where we cannot protect the people that we love and care about?
- This is exposing the lack of leadership we have in our country. It is time for everyone in Congress to come out and say police brutality must stop.
- There must be a thorough checking of a person's background before they become a cop to see if they have hurt people. They need to be tested and keep watching them to see if they follow the rules about touching people.

- Police should not do choke holds. When they put handcuffs on someone they cannot hold them on the ground, they should help the person sit up. (To be honest, this whole situation is like the restraints that some teachers and staff use to control children and adults with disabilities.)
- Police should go through training but training alone will not fix the problem. Policy change will be more effective than training. What these officers in Minneapolis did is wrong. They murdered a man just because he was Black. They should be arrested and put in jail.
- America needs to stop fearing people of color. This country needs to stop seeing diversity as a threat. We dream of a world where all people's differences are respected.