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**The Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP) & Community
Partners Share Numerous Recommendations for Improved
Community Police Relations & Increased Police Accountability
Throughout the Pittsburgh Region**

Monday, April 15, 2019 – 9:30 am – B-PEP Headquarters

With the police shooting death of 17 year old honor student Antwon Michael Rose, II of June 19, 2018, and the decision of the jury to find former East Pittsburgh police officer NOT GUILTY ON ALL COUNTS, many citizens, of all races and ages, continue to find this decision beyond troubling and very hard to accept. It seems to many of us that on Friday, March 22, 2019 at 9:07 pm the wheels of justice in Allegheny County came to a screeching halt!! Many of us continue to feel that we have been asked to not believe ‘our lying eyes’. Many of us continue to feel that *true* justice was not achieved. Many of feel that there are laws that are written to favor a police officer to the point that it appears that it is almost *impossible* to convict a police officer in the death of a citizen. When one adds ‘race’ to the situation, such as a White police officer killing a Black teenager, the probability of any conviction seems to be even less likely.

The Black Political Empowerment Project feels that if there was ever a time, in recent history, to review efforts to improve community-police relations and the level of professionalism, to revisit police policies and procedures, and the laws that affect how police are tried in the courts when they have killed citizens of the communities they are paid to protect and serve, that time has come. That time is NOW!!

Over the past few years and months the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP) has made several recommendations what we feel, if

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fully implemented and ongoingly will reduce negative and possibly tragic interactions between the community and the police.

1. One such recommendation we addressed publicly on last Tuesday, April 9, 2019, that was to request area police departments to accept our request, of some years, to require that every police officer be required to read, sign off on having read the now revised **YOU AND THE POLICE** brochure, and to take a quiz to confirm that each officer is indeed aware of the contents of this important document. We are very happy that several key area police departments have accepted our request, we now ask that all police and political leaders in the area urge **ALL** area police departments to accept this challenge. We feel that a positive response to this request is particularly important to be received from many of the smaller police departments which may not have the level of training as some of our larger area police departments and bureaus have. As we continue, with various community partners, led by the Independent Pittsburgh Citizen Police Review Board (CPRB) and its Director, Beth Pittinger, to share the revised brochure, it has become quite clear that both the community and the police must be on the same page in terms of knowledge of what to do when stopped by police.

Yesterday, to further that goal I emailed a letter to Pittsburgh Public Schools Supt. Dr. Anthony Hamlet to urge that he accept our request that his officers read, sign off and take the quiz, and that *all* Pittsburgh Public School students be required to do the same, through a training which could occur through the social studies classes. (The letter is attached to this press release). The Black Political Empowerment Project strongly recommends that *all* area schools educate their students, probably through their social studies classes on the contents of the new brochure, and that each student be required to take a quiz that would help assure that each student has indeed read the document. We view this request as a request to increase public safety for all area students and an opportunity to establish a better working relationship between students and the police. CPRB Director Beth Pittinger has informed me that since our press conference where she announced the printing of 10,000 brochures, that as of the other day she was down to only about 400 brochures and has ordered another 10,000

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copies of the revised brochure. This is good news in that people are responding to our public request, including police officers!

2. **The Black Political Empowerment Project was one of the early supporters of the effort led by longtime civil rights advocate, Khalid Raheem, to advocate for the establishment of some sort of County-wide Citizen Police Review Board. With the death of Antwon Michael Rose, II and the comments from District Attorney Stephan A. Zappala, Jr. at his press conference which followed the death of Antwon, where he stated that it appeared that the East Pittsburgh Police Department had little or no training, it appears to B-PEP, and others, that the public *must* have access to some sort of *independent* citizen police review board which would be able to provide some reasonable level of objective analysis of the facts in questionable interactions between citizens and police officers. This is yet another tool that can be utilized throughout Allegheny County to help lay a new foundation of accountability for area police departments to the public they serve. We also recommend that resources be provided to the Pgh. Independent Citizen Police Review Board to put them in position to lend their twenty (20) years of expertise to many of the surrounding police departments.**

3. **The Black Political Empowerment Project has advocated in meetings with political and police officials to seek Allegheny County funds, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania state funds, federal funds and/or corporate and foundation funding to allow the Allegheny County Police Department to take over some of the police responsibilities of some of the smaller area police departments, including racial sensitivity training, cultural competence, training in the use of force and other ‘best practices’. There seems to be as willingness to explore this possibility. There is interest in possibly having training available at the 911 Allegheny County center and/or at a City of Pittsburgh facility. CPRB Director Beth Pittinger also suggested in our November 14, 2018 meeting with police officials that area municipalities, their insurers and solicitors attend what might be a six to eight hour training for area police departments. Mr. Wendell Hissrich, Pittsburgh’s Director of Public Safety stated in that meeting that such training could very well take place on a quarterly basis, possibly in different regions of the County. It was also suggested that getting this**

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training to be ‘certified’ would be an incentive in making the request of urging officers from area police departments to attend these trainings more palatable and more workable for the police departments involved. The possibility of having Implicit Bias Training as a training block at the Annual the FBI National Academy for Western Pennsylvania might also be a possibility.

- 4 B-PEP has urged the Pittsburgh Police Bureau to provide some of the smaller area police departments with the Bureau’s Implicit Bias Training which currently every Pittsburgh police officer and every city employee is *required* to have. Our hope is that such training will positively affect how members of these smaller departments interact with African Americans and people of color, people of different sexual persuasions, immigrants, and people of whatever race or ethnicity from any of the poorer communities. We also requested and received confirmation from our Pittsburgh Bureau of Police that they will create some form of ‘reminders’ for police officers who have taken the Implicit Bias Training, messages that could run as a trailer at the bottom of the internal police message boards and monitors. The Police Bureau’s “Did You Know” email series could also be used for this purpose. B-PEP strongly feels that *reinforced* messages are messages that remain in the minds of all of us, including those paid ”to protect and serve”.
- 5 B-PEP urges both political and police officials to take on, as a priority, the creation a decertification process for police officers who have histories of serious misconduct and, at times, even criminal backgrounds. This process would, in fact, take away their state issued police license. It has been the position of the Black Political Empowerment Project, and others, that such a process may have prevented the hiring of Michael Rosfeld by the now defunct East Pittsburgh Police Department. If that hiring had not taken place it is very possible that Antwon Michael Rose, II might be alive today.
- 6 B-PEP has urged, and continues to advocate for, the consolidation of some of the area’s smaller police departments which could possibly provide financial savings to each of the participating police departments, as well as improved training and educational

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opportunities to all of the affected officers. With all of the smaller departments in Allegheny County, we are always going to have undermanned, over-stressed, and under-trained officers. B-PEP had advocated this over this past summer in a meeting with Baldwin Borough Chief Mike Scott, president of the Western PA Police Chiefs Association, South Park Township Chief Dennis McDonough, President of the Allegheny County Police Chiefs Association, and Allegheny County Police Superintendent, Coleman McDonough. We were heartened to hear on April 4th that residents of four Mon Valley communities, North Braddock, Rankin, Whitaker and East Pittsburgh are considering the possibility of merging their police departments, and have agreed to have the Commonwealth perform a feasibility study. The Post Gazette article of April 8, 2019 stated “It would be fitting if a regional, more professional, better equipped police department resulted from Antwon Rose II’s death.”. We absolutely agree with that sentiment.

The Allegheny Valley communities of Sharpsburg, Aspinwall, O’Hara and Blawnox have also studied the possibility of a regional force. Though the study did not recommend a regionalized force at this time, according to a Post Gazette article of March 1, 2019 the study *did* recommend that O’Hara should discuss with Blawnox the possibility of contracting police services. One positive affect of the study was that the bringing together of all four municipalities has strengthened municipal ties and has increased cooperation and collaboration of all police chiefs/superintendents and officers. We urge all of the smaller police departments throughout Allegheny County, and beyond, to seriously look at the possibility of consolidation and the potential benefits thereof. If there are financial incentives which could be provided by governmental, private and/or foundation sources to encourage these consolidations those incentives should indeed be provided.

7. B-PEP also advocates a thorough review, by area police departments, of how police address situations which involve people who are apparently having a mental health crisis. On Wednesday, March 27, 2019 an officer employed by the State College Police Department in Centre County Pennsylvania shot and killed Osaze Osagie, a 29 year old African American man who appeared to be

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having a mental health crisis. The officers were serving on Mr. Osage at his apartment what was termed a mental health warrant, which is issued when a person may be subject to involuntary commitment under Pennsylvania law. The ACLU of Pennsylvania called this death "...a senseless tragedy" They also stated the following: "Police violence against people of color is a symptom of our country's inability to come to grips with how racial inequality poisons life in America for Black and brown people. Twenty-five to 50 percent of all police killings involve people with disabilities. Osaze's death is another example of how police acting as first responders for people who are in the midst of a mental health crisis can turn tragic. We need mental health professionals to be the first responders to people who are having health crises – not police...The State College Police Department also owes full disclosure on how its officers are trained to respond to calls about people with mental disabilities....The tragedy of police violence in America will end only when public officials take it seriously. It's time for the epidemic of Americans being killed by police, who are supposed to protect and serve, to stop." The hope of the Black Political Empowerment Project is that this tragic incident will be useful for area police departments to review their policies and procedures with regard to how police officers interface with people with mental disabilities, possibly in partnership with key mental health facilities.

There have also been high profile cases of police officers shooting and wounding people with autism. An Aspinwall police officer, Scott Bailey, who has two sons with the autism spectrum, has helped produce an instructional video to help police officers learn to identify and appropriately deal with people with autism. There's also been an effort to get stickers for one's car and front door, and possibly a voluntary autism identification card. B-PEP advocates that such information be shared with all area police departments to help avoid unnecessary interactions between the police and citizens with autism.

- 7 For the past few years the Black Political Empowerment Project has advocated for what we have called "The Due Process Act". With the ongoing mixed reactions to how the local District Attorney's office prosecuted the Michael Rosfeld case, interest has been reignited to consider the idea of having some form of an

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independent prosecutor in cases when a police officer is accused of killing a private citizen. B-PEP continues to advocate for such cases to automatically be placed under the jurisdiction of the State Attorney General's office for purposes of overseeing the investigation and the possible prosecution of these cases. (The details of the proposed Due Process Act) are attached.

- 8 Lastly, the fact that former East Pittsburgh officer Michael Rosfeld was not convicted of even *involuntary* manslaughter in the death of Antwon Michael Rose, II, it has caused many people to question the law that apparently allowed no conviction in this case and the need to seriously review that law and to pursue a revision of the law which would provide citizens with a more balanced opportunity for justice. In our opinion, at this time “justice is not blind” when it comes to a police officer being accused of killing a private citizen. In the PA Use of Force Law Enforcement it states that “He is justified in the use of force which he believes to be necessary to effect the arrest and of any force which he believes to be necessary to defend himself or another from bodily harm while making the arrest. However, he is justified in using deadly force only when he believes that such force is necessary to prevent death or serious bodily injury to himself or such other person, or when he believes both: that such force is necessary to prevent the arrest from being defeated by resistance or escape; and the person to be arrested has committed or attempted to forcible felony or is attempting to escape and possesses a deadly weapon, or otherwise indicates that he will endanger human life or inflict serious bodily injury unless arrested without delay....” It is the position of the Black Political Empowerment Project that this law provides far too much cover for a police officer who does not respect the awesome power he or she has ‘to take a life’!! We support those legislators how are attempting to advocate for a change in the law which dictates the use of ‘deadly force’. We laud PA State Representative Summer Lee and PA State Representative Ed Gainey for introducing legislation which attempts to deal with this imbalance. We are also appreciative of their efforts, along with Brandi Fisher of the Alliance For Police Accountability and Fawn Walker Montgomery of Take Action Mon Valley in scheduling lobbying effort in Harrisburg on Tuesday, April 23, 2019. I expect to join them. We encourage as many people as possible to attend. We

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are also appreciative of the efforts of Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto to arrange, with support from the Foundation community, to provide busses to go to Harrisburg on Tuesday, April 30th to advocate for change.

Tim Stevens Chairman & CEO The Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)/Co-convener, Greater Pittsburgh Coalition Against Violence (CAV) 412-758-7898

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