August 19, 2020

MAYOR BARAKA’S STATEMENT
ON CCRB DECISION

We are extremely disappointed in the New Jersey State Supreme Court ruling today that severely restricts the powers of the Civilian Complaint Review Board, which we created with a City ordinance in 2016 as a response to the DOJ consent decree that listed Internal Affairs investigations as a barrier to fair and constitutional policing.

At this time in our nation’s history where the world watched the barbarism of Officer Chauvin as he murdered George Floyd with a knee on his neck, the New Jersey Supreme Court’s action is out of step with national sentiment, and failed to remove the knee off the necks of many of us in New Jersey. In a time where our nation demands justice and fairness, today’s ruling was a shocking blow to basic humanity.

Our humanity has always been in question (see Dred Scott v Sandford 1857). Police are created to protect people and property. We never were considered people and once we were no longer property, we seemed to have lost all protections. So we are back to the question, do our lives matter, and it seems that in New Jersey it’s still a debate.

What we are asking for is the community’s right to know how our police are being policed. To have the necessary and complete investigative power, we needed our CCRB to have subpoena power in two areas.

First, we needed to be able to get police Internal Affairs documents relative to a citizen complaint of police misconduct or brutality.

Second, we needed the ability to call police before the CCRB for testimony.

Only with these powers can we assure our community of complete transparency and accountability in the investigations of police abuse.

The court’s ruling has denied us that opportunity.

We will not allow today’s judgment to go unchallenged but rather we must dare and demand that our leadership has the courage in this precarious moment to do what is right and break the holds of inequity and systemic inequality. We are now calling on the State Legislature to create laws that give all New Jersey municipalities the subpoena power we sought, and for Attorney General Gurbir Grewal, as the state’s top law enforcer, to create such policies that give us those rights.

We have come too far in this battle for the public’s rightful access to police information to give up, and we will appeal this decision to the federal courts. We will not stop the fight for our collective justice.