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Community Groups in Cleveland Denounce Issue 33, Say More than Minor Changes Needed to Reform Police Review Board

CLEVELAND - Members from the Cleveland-based chapters of Black Lives Matter and Showing Up for Racial Justice are criticizing what they call weak revisions to the Police Review Board: a set of minor changes to appear before voters on this Election Day. The groups say Issue 33 is "a watered-down version of what is needed" and that it represents an opportunity for Clevelanders to "tune in and demand real reform."

Changes to Cleveland's Police Review Board are mandated by a consent decree, or settlement agreement, between the City of Cleveland and the federal Department of Justice after a DOJ investigation found that the Cleveland Department of Police was rampant with misconduct, excessive use of force, and unresolved complaints. However, the settlement does not dictate which changes must be made to the Review Board; that was left up to City Council.

"We are where we are right now because the Cleveland police were engaging in 'a pattern and practice of excessive use of force.' This isn't, and never has been, a 'few bad apples' misbehaving," said Kareem Henton of Black Lives Matter. "That is why we need a board of citizens not influenced by, affiliated with, or selected by city government or law enforcement, who represent the most affected communities and who review complaints against the police. But that review board will be nothing but a symbol if it doesn't have the ability to investigate and discipline officers. That's what this weak and watered-down amendment leaves room for."

The changes to the police review board would be implemented via an amendment to Cleveland's city charter, which will be voted on November 8th. Cleveland residents, advocacy organizations, and the Cleveland Community Police Commission recommended many provisions that ultimately were not incorporated into the amendment by City Council, such as diversity requirements.

"The passage of Issue 33 would not change our weak public oversight system in any substantial way," said Malcolm Himschoot of SURJ. "We in Cleveland need real reform instead."

Additional organizations represent grassroots opposition to the proposed city charter amendment, including:

- Bill of Rights Defense Committee/ Defending Dissent Foundation
- Black Man's Army
- Black on Black Crime, Inc
- Cleveland Nonviolence Network
- Cleveland Peace Action
- CodePink Cleveland
- Colour Abundant World Prophetic Witness Team-Western Ohio & Western Reserve Associations, United Church of Christ
- Criminal Justice Prophetic Witness Team-Eastern Ohio & Western Reserve Associations, United Church of Christ
- InterReligious Task Force on Central America
- Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee
- Organize CLE
- Stop Targeting Ohio's Poor
- Tamir Rice Justice Committee
- The Laura Cowan Foundation

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More information on the ballot issue can be found on the SURJ website:
<http://surjneo.org/working-groups/community-police-commission/>.