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California Attorneys for Criminal Justice

**CACJ Calls on Legislature to Create
State Independent Prosecutor To Investigate Police Shootings**
Statewide attorney group asks for bill to pass in 2020

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Sacramento – Today the California Attorneys for Criminal Justice (CACJ), the preeminent statewide association of criminal defense attorneys in private practice and working in public defender offices calls on the California Legislature to immediately adopt legislation to create a state independent prosecutor to investigate, file charges, and prosecute police officers for unjustified shootings. The California Legislature adjourns its session on August 31, 2020, and are considering multiple bills related to police abuse and accountability.

“For years, and decades, almost every proposal to independently investigate and hold them accountable have been blocked by the police lobby at both the state and local level,” stated Eric Schweitzer President of CACJ and an attorney in Fresno, California. “They’ve stopped local civilian review boards from having independent authority to subpoena and investigate, and they have stood in the way of independent prosecutions. But at this moment, when the world is outraged about how our police operate, now is the time to finally pass an independent prosecutor law.”

In the Bay Area, there has only been one prosecution of a peace officer in the past 15 years. In Los Angeles County, there has only been one prosecution since 2001.

“When there isn’t an independent body investigating and making prosecution decisions, we end up with few if any prosecutions.” Allison Zuvela, Vice-President of CACJ and a public defender in Yolo County in northern California. “Local cops don’t arrest their fellow officers or prosecutors choose not to file charges. DA decisions can be delayed so long that the community cannot have confidence in the system of accountability,” stated Zuvela.

CACJ calls on the legislature to amend AB 1506 or another bill to establish an office of the State Independent Prosecutor with the authority to investigate, file charges and prosecute law enforcement. The Independent Prosecutor office must have a strict firewall around it to prevent the AG or other entity from influencing the decision-making process.

CACJ has taken an Oppose Unless Amended position on AB 1506 and asked to replace its provisions giving law enforcement the authority to decide whether the Attorney General or local prosecutors will investigate a case. While CACJ recognizes that the AG can play a role in accountability, an independent prosecutor is the most effective approach since the AG is billed as the state’s “top cop” and has some legal duties to work with law enforcement. AB 1506 is scheduled for a hearing on Wednesday August 12, 2020 at 2:00 pm in the Senate Public Safety Committee.

“People continue to be murdered without accountability because of the political strength of the law enforcement lobby,” added Steve Munkelt, CACJ Executive Director. “Now is the time for our legislators to put aside political expediency, and make a bold move to protect our communities.”