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**Together BR Statement on Alton Sterling investigation**

***Community organization calls upon federal agencies to include investigation into state criminal charges, and either bring those charges directly or make specific recommendations on charges to officials with local jurisdiction***

This is a time of grieving in our community. It is a time of anger. And it is time of raising, and answering, a fundamental question – whether the killing of a member of our community, Alton Sterling, by a member of our police force was justified or unjustified.

One thing is of paramount importance at a time such as this – public trust in the integrity of the process of criminal justice.

We are raising a concern that we believe needs to be addressed by state, local and federal officials, publicly and in clear terms. We want to be clear from the outset that the concern we are raising is one that we believe *can* be addressed. We would like, in our remarks, to share what we think needs to be said and done to accomplish that goal.

We appreciate the speed with which Governor John Bel Edwards requested federal participation in the investigation into the police shooting of Alton Sterling, which we believe was intended to help instill the public trust that is of such paramount importance.

We want to call attention, however, to a significant potential unintended consequence of that decision, coupled with the decision by the East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney, Hillar Moore, to withdraw from any investigatory role in this case.

The Department of Justice, the FBI and the U.S. Attorney’s Office have announced that they “have opened a civil rights investigation into the death of Alton Sterling.” In all their press statements and remarks to the public, they have reiterated that narrow scope – a “civil rights investigation” – as the focus of their mandate.

A civil rights investigation is, of course, appropriate and of crucial importance. It will investigate whether the police officers involved in the incident intentionally violated the constitutional rights of Mr. Sterling.

A civil rights investigation, however, is the only investigation that is needed. There are a range of other potential criminal charges that need to be investigated, most of which exist in state, not federal law. Those include false arrest, battery, aggravated battery, assault with a deadly weapon, negligent homicide, manslaughter, murder in the second degree, and potentially other crimes.

Since the East Baton Rouge District Attorney announced yesterday that he is withdrawing from an investigatory role, it is not clear who, or whether anyone, is investigating those charges.

If it turned out to be the case that the federal investigation is limited to investigating a civil rights violation, and the local officials are conducting no investigation of their own, then the practical effect of “turning the investigation over to federal officials” is indistinguishable from the District Attorney refusing even conduct an investigation into state crimes and a narrowing of the scope of possible prosecution to a single civil rights violation, which carries with it a higher-than-normal standard of evidence.

We spoke yesterday with the Governor’s Office, the office of the U. S. Attorney, the District Attorney and other officials. And while all of them reiterate their commitment to a full investigation, none have yet addressed the concern we are posing to our satisfaction. Which is why we are raising it publicly now.

Here is what we believe needs to be done to address the matter.

First, we call upon the Department of Justice, the FBI and the U. S. Attorney’s office to state publicly that the scope of their investigation will include, not only potential civil rights violations, but also potential violations of state criminal statutes, including false arrest, battery, aggravated battery, assault with a deadly weapon, negligent homicide, manslaughter, murder in the second degree, and any other crime that could potentially have been committed.

Second, we call upon those federal agencies to make public what charges, including both state and federal charges, they deem the facts of the case to support.

Third, in addition to bringing charges they can bring directly, we call upon those federal agencies to make specific recommendations for what charges they believe should be brought in state court.

Finally, if there are state charges that the federal investigation recommends, we call upon the East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney, or other appropriate authority, to bring those charges.

We believe a public statement committing to these points will play a significant role in assuring full public trust in the integrity of the process of justice that is underway.