

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE**

West Palm Beach County Branch #5143B · South Palm Beach County Branch #5128

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**PUBLIC STATEMENT & PRESS RELEASE**

**THE NAACP DEMANDS ACCOUNTABILITY:  
EXCESSIVE K9 FORCE BY THE PALM BEACH COUNTY SHERIFF'S  
OFFICE**

*March 15, 2026*

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**NOTICE OF PRESS CONFERENCE:** The West Palm Beach County and South Palm Beach County Branches of the NAACP will hold a press conference at the Office of the State Attorney, 15th Judicial Circuit, Palm Beach County Wednesday March 18, 2026; 2pm. Members of the public, media, and community partners are invited and encouraged to attend. Details regarding the date and time will be released through official NAACP channels.

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**I. A STATEMENT TO THE PEOPLE OF PALM BEACH COUNTY**

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The West Palm Beach County and South Palm Beach County Branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People issue this public statement to inform our community of a deeply troubling incident of excessive force carried out by the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office — and to make clear, in no uncertain terms, what we are demanding in response.

The NAACP has stood for over 115 years as this nation's oldest and most distinguished civil rights organization. We do not issue statements of this nature lightly. We do so because the evidence before us compels it, the law demands it, and this community deserves it.

On March 8, 2026, at approximately 2:50 PM, in the Publix parking lot at 127 SR 7, Royal Palm Beach, Florida, a PBSO K9 unit was deployed during the arrest of a suspect — at a moment when multiple trained law enforcement agents were already present and actively engaged in physically restraining that individual. Having reviewed the available video footage of this incident on multiple occasions, the NAACP has reached the independent and joint conclusion that the deployment of that K9, at the moment and in the manner in which it was used, constituted unnecessary, disproportionate, and excessive force.

Let us be unequivocal: every person subject to arrest under the laws of the United States retains constitutional protections. The Fourth Amendment prohibits unreasonable seizure. The Eighth Amendment prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. Neither provision is suspended because an arrest warrant exists. The NAACP will not allow those protections to be treated as optional.

**II. THIS IS NOT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT — IT IS A PATTERN**

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We would be failing in our duty if we allowed this incident to be characterized as an aberration. The record of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office on K9 use of force is public, documented, and deeply alarming:

- **The Gerson Delmas Incident (January 2023):** A PBSO K9 was deployed against Mr. Delmas while he was already handcuffed and shackled. PBSO's own Internal Affairs unit determined that the officer violated department policy. Sheriff Bradshaw personally overruled that finding, writing in his own hand that the force was appropriate. Legal and training

experts publicly disagreed. The community has never received accountability for that decision.

- **Christopher Connelly Federal Civil Rights Lawsuit (2024):** A federal lawsuit was filed against PBSO and three deputies following an arrest captured on camera, alleging excessive force and unlawful arrest. Mr. Connelly's words — "I just want justice. I don't want it to happen to anyone else" — speak for too many people in this county.
- **Ricky Whidden Wrongful Death (December 2016):** PBSO Deputy Justin Rigney, already named in a K9 mistreatment whistleblower lawsuit filed by a fellow officer, was involved in the death of Ricky Whidden, a 46-year-old man living with schizophrenia. A federal appeals court found that a jury — not the department — must decide whether the force used was constitutional. A life was lost.
- **Recent K9 Biting Incident (March 2026):** As recently as this week, bystander video circulating on social media again shows a PBSO suspect being punched and bitten by a K9 during an arrest, again raising questions about use of force standards in this department.

This is not anecdotal. This is a documented, recurring pattern that demands structural intervention — and the NAACP intends to pursue that intervention with every tool available to us.

### **III. THE LEGAL STANDARD THE PBSO MUST BE HELD TO**

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The United States Supreme Court held in *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989) that all excessive force claims during an arrest must be evaluated under the Fourth Amendment's standard of objective reasonableness — considering the severity of the offense, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat, and whether the suspect is actively resisting.

The NAACP demands a full accounting of whether those standards were met in the March 8 deployment. At the moment the K9 was released, the vehicle had already been suppressed and multiple trained agents were physically present and engaged. The public has a right to know whether this deployment met the constitutional threshold — or whether it was an act of unchecked aggression by an officer who chose punishment over professionalism.

Furthermore, the NAACP is on record that the use of K9 force against Black men in Palm Beach County has been a community concern we have monitored for years. When force that would not be tolerated in other contexts is routinely applied against Black individuals, that is not merely a use-of-force issue. It is a civil rights issue. We will treat it as such.

### **IV. WHAT THE NAACP IS DEMANDING OF THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

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The West Palm Beach County and South Palm Beach County Branches of the NAACP have formally submitted the following demands to Sheriff Ric L. Bradshaw and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office. We are making these demands public so that every resident of this county can hold their Sheriff accountable for the response:

- **1. Full Independent Internal Affairs Investigation:** The conduct of the K9 handler involved in the March 8 arrest must be reviewed by Internal Affairs — and that review must not be administratively overridden, as occurred in the Delmas case. The findings must be made public and shared with the NAACP.
- **2. Immediate Review and Reform of K9 Deployment Protocols:** Department guidelines governing K9 deployment must be comprehensively reviewed and revised. Deploying a K9 against an individual already being restrained by multiple officers must be addressed as an explicit policy prohibition unless there exists a specific, articulable, and immediate threat to officer safety.
- **3. Genuine Accountability Without Institutional Shielding:** The officer involved must be held to the same standards that apply to any individual who deploys a dangerous animal to

inflict injury on another person. If Internal Affairs finds a violation — as it did in the Delmas case — that finding must stand. The NAACP will escalate to state and federal authorities if it does not.

- **4. Full Preservation and Public Release of All Footage:** All body-worn camera footage, in-vehicle camera footage, and surveillance footage related to the March 8 arrest must be preserved in complete, unedited form and made available through the public records process without obstruction or improper delay.
- **5. Community Forum and Transparency:** We are requesting that the Sheriff's Office participate in a community forum, jointly organized with the NAACP, at which K9 use of force policies, training standards, and accountability mechanisms are presented to and discussed with the public. This community deserves transparency — not press releases.
- **6. Written Response Within 21 Days:** We require a formal written response from the Sheriff's Office within 21 days of our complaint, confirming that an investigation has been initiated and outlining the specific steps being taken in response to the concerns raised.

## V. OUR MESSAGE TO THIS COMMUNITY

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To the residents of Palm Beach County — and in particular to the Black community of this county — the NAACP wants you to hear this clearly: we see you, we are with you, and we will not stand down.

We are acutely aware of the full circumstances surrounding this arrest. We are aware of the charges alleged. We are aware of the conduct attributed to the individual involved. We hold none of that back. But the constitutional right to be apprehended with proportionality and professionalism does not vanish because a person is charged with a serious offense. The law is not suspended at the moment of arrest. And the NAACP's mandate is not suspended either.

The cameras of the citizens of Palm Beach County are watching. The NAACP is watching. And we have engaged counsel and legislative allies who are watching. We will not allow administrative override to become the standard response to findings of officer misconduct in this county.

We call upon the State Attorney's Office, the Palm Beach County Commission, the Florida NAACP State Conference, and our congressional representatives to take note of the documented pattern we have outlined — and to act accordingly.

The NAACP stands ready to engage constructively with law enforcement and community partners in pursuit of reform. We are equally prepared, should those paths be closed to us, to pursue every legal, legislative, and public avenue at our disposal. The rights of the people of Palm Beach County — all of its people — will be protected.

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*Respectfully and Firmly Submitted,*

**Alfred Fields** | **Dedrick D. Straghn**

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**CC:** Florida State Attorney's Office, 15th Judicial Circuit · Florida NAACP State Conference · Palm Beach County Commission · NAACP National Office, Washington D.C. · WPTV News Channel 5 · CBS12 News (WPEC) · Sun Sentinel

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