

DON'T SHOOT COALITION

Don't Shoot Coalition makes preparations for Michael Brown Grand Jury outcome

Outlines support plan, how police can de-escalate and where responsibility lies

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St. Louis -- The Don't Shoot Coalition, a coalition of approximately 50 local organizations formed in the wake of the police shooting of Michael Brown, announced its plans in response to the anticipated Grand Jury announcement concerning possible criminal charges against Officer Darren Wilson. The coalition has been engaged in significant efforts with numerous community groups and leaders to plan for the anticipated announcement.

"If Officer Wilson is not indicted, we will do our part to try to de-escalate violence without de-escalating action" said Don't Shoot co-chair Michael T. McPhearson, executive director of Veterans For Peace. "We are providing a number of supports to promote a peaceful response, but nothing will make a difference unless the police do their part by giving protesters adequate space. That's the key to peaceful outcomes."

In an effort to ensure community members are able to exercise their constitutional right to assemble in a safe and intimidation-free environment, Don't Shoot members are attempting to negotiate three key elements to a safe police response. First, to come to agreement on [rules of engagement](#) for all involved police agencies to foremost value the safety of those protesting, including a de-militarized response (no armored vehicles, rubber bullets, rifles or tear gas). Second, to provide advance public notice of the date of the announcement of the Grand Jury's decision so groups can prepare and direct people to productive actions. Finally, police must respect established sanctuary safe spaces as off-limits.

Throughout the protests since the shooting death of unarmed teenager Michael Brown on August 9, escalation has largely resulted from an intrusive police presence. When police have given protesters space, and allowed for self-policing, the actions have remained peaceful. "For nearly three months protest leaders have maintained the peace, with the only real incidents of conflict resulting solely from police engagement," said Montague Simmons, chair Organization for Black Struggle.

"If we see violence, make no mistake, the responsibility for it lies with law enforcement," said organizer and Don't Shoot member Damon Davis. "Since the day they left Michael Brown's body in the street for more than four hours, the government has failed to answer the cries of the public time and again. There has been no accountability or transparency. It's wrong to show that kind of the disregard for people's feelings and people react."

In addition to negotiating the conditions of response to any uprisings, the Don't Shoot Coalition is involved with providing an array of supports to protesters including jail support, trained de-escalators, safe spaces for conversation and counseling in area faith institutions. Coalition members will also show dissent in the historic tradition of, non-violent direct action, as advocated by civil and human rights leaders around the world, including Mahatma Gandhi and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Coalition groups will take action throughout the St. Louis area as an effective non-violent means to advocate for change and encourage people in the region to participate.

"There will be plenty of ways for people to join us in peaceful protest," said Don't Shoot co-chair and Advancement Project Senior Attorney Denise Lieberman. "This is an opportunity for everyone in the region to come together in our commitment to justice."

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