October 3, 2016

Re: Defunding Urban Shield

Dear Supervisors Haggerty, Valle, Chan, Miley, and Carson:

I am writing you today to ask you to exclude Urban Shield from any proposals submitted for funding to the Bay Area Urban Areas Security Initiative for Fiscal Year 2017.

Seminary of the Street is an interfaith training academy for people of faith called to social change work. Our students are diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, and ability. Because of the highly racialized, militarized climate of contemporary policing–which is perpetuated by trainings like Urban Shield–our community fears for the safety of our students of color, as well as our students with mental health challenges. We ask you to help us keep our students safe by ending Urban Shield.

I know that Urban Shield is billed as an emergency preparedness activity. However, the training scenarios perpetuate racist and xenophobic stereotypes, increase the use of militarized weaponry and tactics in everyday law enforcement, and cost taxpayers millions of dollars. Since 2007, the lion’s share of funding that could be supporting emergency preparedness in the Bay Area has been poured into increasing the militarization of local law enforcement. The climate of increased police killings, militarized SWAT raids and sweeps, and surveillance technologies, including drones, has frayed already tattered community/police relations, destabilized neighborhoods, and broken up families across the Bay Area.

Alameda County has an opportunity to seek funding for emergency response resources that prioritize health and wellbeing and not militarized policing.  UASI funding could instead by dedicated to such initiatives as Community Emergency Response Trainings, the People’s Community Medics, and Learn, Lead, Lift, all of which increase our capacity to respond to emergencies without militarizing first responders.

Alameda County decision makers play an important role in determining the nature, form, and implementation of the county’s emergency preparedness. Shifting disaster preparedness priorities toward community strength and resilience and away from war games and militarization is an important way to demonstrate a commitment to shoring up preparedness without making the county’s communities vulnerable.  I ask that the Board of Supervisors to use its power to restrict or approve the resources for which the Sheriff’s Department applies and receives, and reject or pull any proposal for UASI funds that include Urban Shield.

Sincerely,

Nichola Torbett

Director, Seminary of the Street