Dear Alameda County Board of Supervisors,

UAW 2865, the union of University of California teaching assistants and other student-workers, is writing you today to express our deep concerns about the controversial Urban Shield training and weapons expo held in Alameda County.  We have learned that funding proposals to the Bay Area Urban Areas Security Initiative will be due on October 14.  We feel strongly that the Board of Supervisors should *exclude* Urban Shield from any funding proposals for Fiscal Year 2017.  Alameda County has an opportunity to seek funding for emergency response resources that prioritize health and wellbeing and not militarized policing.  We hope the Board takes this opportunity to defund Urban Shield now.

Our union represents 15,000 teaching assistants, tutors, and graders across nine campuses of the University of California. We are mostly graduate students who are employed by the university in these crucial frontline educator positions. We believe that Alameda County should support public investment in our communities, including basic social resources such as education. While we are extremely supportive of Alameda County developing, supporting, and increasing its capacity to respond to emergencies, we do not support divisive and dangerous programs such as Urban Shield. We know that Urban Shield is billed as an emergency preparedness activity. However the war games 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.

We know the impacts of prioritizing programs like Urban Shield over programs and initiatives that actually support the health and wellbeing of our communities, both during everyday life and in times of emergency: Members of our own union have experienced racial profiling, harassment, and arrest for being mistaken as so-called trespassers simply because of the color of their skin, even though they are enrolled students. We are extremely worried that such frightening encounters with police both on and off campus may escalate, resulting in injury or death, and add to the rising death toll nation-wide of police killings, particularly of African-Americans.

Urban Shield is failing our communities when it comes to preparing ourselves for the emergencies to which we are particularly vulnerable. The time has come for the Bay Area to shift its orientation toward preparing for emergencies.  We insist that the health and wellbeing impacts of such preparation lead our efforts rather than go left unaddressed.  UASI funding could be mobilized to support that shift. One example of an emergency response program that can be supported is the San Francisco [Community Awareness & Treatment Services](http://sfhomeless.wikia.com/wiki/Community_Awareness_%26_Treatment_Services%2C_Inc._%28CATS%29_-_Mobile_Assistance_Patrol_%28MAP%29) which organizes transport for homeless people and people with addiction to needed facilities, including health facilities. These types of non-law enforcement emergency response programs greatly benefit all of our communities.

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.  We ask that the Board of Supervisors 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.

Thank you for your attention and action on this important matter.  As always, we would be enthusiastic about meeting with you and discussing these issues further.

Sincerely,

UAW 2865 Joint Council