

New York police union offers \$500 bounty to vigilantes for assisting in arrests

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In a brazen display of contempt for those who oppose police violence, one New York City police union is seeking to bribe the public to not only accept, but to actively assist, in police brutality.

The Sergeants Benevolent Association (SBA), New York City's police sergeant's union, announced a new program offering a \$500 reward to any citizen who assists a New York City law enforcement officer in apprehending an individual resisting arrest.

The program, named Help A Cop, was created by the SBA, which represents 13,000 active and retired New York Police Department (NYPD) sergeants. Since the announcement, trucks equipped with digital billboards have been dispatched to each of the five boroughs in New York City, advertising the program with slogans such as, "Put your camera down—Become a good Samaritan."

SBA President, Ed Mullins, held a press conference to introduce Help A Cop and speak about the motivation behind it. "We will offer a \$500 reward for any individual who comes to the aid to any member of the law enforcement in the City of New York while making an arrest and someone is resisting that arrest, and they help that officer." This includes officers from other police agencies such as the FBI, the DEA, the state police, and MTA officers. While the program literature does not mention ICE, as a federal agency, it is doubtlessly also be included in the SBA's bounty program, encouraging an escalation of the war on immigrants.

When asked by reporters what someone should do to help an officer, Mullins encouraged the use of physical force on the suspect—"Grab his hand or hold him down"—in order to "give us that extra edge." Mullins was also asked whether the NYPD's ban on chokeholds should be reversed, to which he responded, "When you're fighting for your life, you do whatever you need to go home." He continued, "If you're resisting arrest, we need to be able to make you comply."

Speaking about what the program is trying to combat, Mullins cited the "Ferguson Effect," the unsubstantiated theory that there has been a spike in crime nationwide resulting from increased scrutiny of police activity after the mass protests over the 2014 police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, which in turn has made police officers fear that their activities will be recorded by bystanders and posted online, resulting in "hands-off policing."

Mullins connected this to the problematic "mixed messages" supposedly coming from the public. "You're telling us you want enforcement. You're telling us to make arrests. You're promoting more arrests, more summonses. And then when it goes wrong, when it goes bad, we have an officer indicted."

With these deeply reactionary statements, Mullins rejects the notion that a police officer should be punished, seemingly in any circumstance, and makes the argument that an officer should never be punished if he or she is attempting to enforce the law, even when committing murder.

"The process of taking cell phone videos versus helping a police officer has to stop," Mullins stated. This anti-democratic position, where police are seen to be above the law, opposes the right of by-standers to record police activity, while at the same time recruiting these bystanders as temporary extensions of the police force in exchange for a monetary reward.

The official document announcing the Help A Cop program says, "Far too often we see police officers engaged in violent struggles with perpetrators while members of the public stand by and take videos of the incident with their cell phone cameras." Help A Cop's main slogan, "Put Your Camera Down—Become A Good Samaritan" is displayed on the program's website. The aim of this Big-Brother motto is clear: stop documenting police violence and start assisting in police violence, even

without knowing anything about the actions of the person being apprehended.

Under current New York State law, people coming to the aid of a cop involved in a violent struggle will not be legally protected and will be liable, should the suspect decide to sue. Mullins addressed this fact when asked at the press conference if civilians aiding police could be sued, blandly stating, “Probably they could be sued.”

Despite acknowledging this issue, the SBA still chose to implement the program and is “looking into” legislation with New York state senator Martin Golden, a retired cop, to create a Good Samaritan law to protect individuals who assist an officer.

The NYPD has not voiced support for Help A Cop. A police spokesperson said, “The NYPD encourages people to support their cops by calling 911. The department doesn’t want to see people put in harm’s way unnecessarily to collect a reward.” Mullins has not concealed his hostility to the NYPD leadership, publicly calling Commissioner James O’Neill, as well as police chiefs and elected officials in general, “weak.”

This past weekend, Mullins tweeted a video of cops being harassed by two young adults, adding, “Seems like two more turds raised by parents who simply don’t care. In a matter of time the people of NYC will see a drastic change in safety on city streets. It’s all beginning to erode, don’t say you weren’t warned! Thank the Mayor & Police Commissioner who just don’t back cops.” This mix of belligerent and childish language, cut from the same fascistic cloth as Trump, comes from a leading representative of police officers in New York City.

The Help A Cop program is not only an effort by the most reactionary elements in the state apparatus to clamp down on the documenting of police violence, but encourages right-wing vigilante forces to actively assist the state in brutalizing the working class.



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