

California Act to Save Lives

As of July 2nd, there have been 457 civilian deaths at the hands of police in 2019 in the United States, on pace to match the statistics for the entirety of 2016, 2017, and 2018, which are all in the 990-999 range. Comparatively, 917 non-OCO military personnel died in 2018. In examining these statistics, we see an alarming trend. When the police are killing more people than there are deaths from war, it's clear that there is an issue of the police overusing lethal force in interactions with civilians. These problems are especially prevalent in California, where there have been a number of such cases in recent years. AB-392, a bill currently being voted on the California legislature, aims to change that by limiting the kinds of situations in which an officer is permitted to use deadly force. While some people have reservations about the bill stating concerns with its impact on police work, I argue it would ultimately keep Californians safe and police officers out of incriminating situations.

Police brutality is not a rare subject in American conversations, as many civilians have lost their lives to a trigger-happy police officer. Stephon Clark, for one, is an example of why AB-392 was created. On March 18th, 2018, Clark was shot eight times by Sacramento police.. Police involved claimed that Clark had approached them waving a weapon. However, this claim didn't match up with the autopsy report, which indicated that six of the eight shots were to his back. Additionally, it was found that he had actually been holding a cell phone. Unnecessary killings like this are not an isolated incident. In 2016, Kern County police shot and killed Francisco Serna in response to a report of an armed man in a local neighborhood. A witness pointed Serna out to the police, and he was shot soon afterward. However, it was later confirmed that Serna did not have a firearm on him and did not pose any real threat. These are just two of

the many, many innocent civilians killed by police in recent years prompting the need for legislation to prevent such cases.

Deaths like those of Stephon Clark and Francisco Serna are the ones AB-392 aims to stop, specifically through limiting the use of lethal force. Under current Californian law, an officer may use lethal force to prevent escape or overcome resistance. This is true even when there are other options. However, the new bill states that an officer may only use lethal force when absolutely necessary. The bill does not define what necessary is, but it is implied that policemen should only use force when they have no other option. If policemen had acted according to AB -392 in cases such as Clark or Serna's, the civilians likely would have survived. AB-392 also permits the "totality of circumstances" to be examined in trials, which includes the officer's actions leading up to the moment they used lethal force. Previously, only the moment of the shooting itself could be examined. This is just another layer of complexity in the bill that is meant to keep people safe, a clear step in the right direction.

Despite its good intentions, this bill was, at first, opposed by police officers who argued that it would slow them down when they were faced with a split-second decision. Fearing being put away for life over one bad decision, an officer may hesitate and lose valuable time, which the suspect could then use to severely injure or kill the officer or bystanders. While this is a valid concern, it doesn't happen often, as evidenced by the fact that I could not find a single article on it. However, the senators took this into consideration, causing them to make several changes to the bill. Fortunately, the revised version will still keep the general public safe from overzealous police, while giving policemen the freedom to keep themselves and the public safe from threats.

AB-392 is also called the California Act to Save Lives - and that is exactly what it will do. While it does not solve every problem with police and civilian interactions, many consider it,

myself included, a dramatic step in the right direction. With this bill, the number of innocent lives taken by the police will decrease and the police force will be more effective at saving lives than ever before. Positive change doesn't happen overnight, but it does over time through prudent governmental policy. This bill proves just that.

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