



SOCIAL ACTION COMMISSION
African Methodist Episcopal Church
Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, *Chairperson*
Jacquelyn Dupont-Walker, *Director*

1621 Wellington Road
Los Angeles, California 90019
213-494-9493 - voice
idupontw@aol.com – email

AME Church Pledges Vigilance To Insure Complete Investigation of Spring Valley High Incident

(Los Angeles) “One more time, we witness the almost unbelievable action by someone sworn to protect and defend, and who appears to be engaged in body slamming,” lamented Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, chair of the AME Social Action Commission. In videos taken by students at Spring Valley High School in Columbia, South Carolina, Ben Fields, Richland County Sheriff’s Deputy, assigned as a school resource officer in a public high school can be seen grabbing, slamming, and throwing a young woman like a rag doll. What could she have done to deserve this type of treatment?

Lt. Curtis Wilson, a spokesman for the department, identified the Richland County Sheriff’s deputy in the video as a deputy who is assigned as one of the school’s resource officers at Spring Valley High School in Columbia, South Carolina. Wilson said the department was investigating what led up to the incident, as well as the deputy’s actions. “The continuous saga of police mistreatment and confrontation with youths of color is particularly disturbing,” says Bishop Julius McAllister, president of the AME Council of Bishops. In fact, Fields’ background of lawsuits and prior accusations of excessive force suggest strongly that he is ill-suited as a school resource officer position. Further, are law enforcement officials the best people to serve as enforcers of discipline for non-criminal behavior?

A spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Justice confirmed on Tuesday that federal authorities had opened a civil rights investigation. We applaud the quick action of the Columbia FBI Field Office, the Civil Rights Division, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of South Carolina who have opened a civil rights investigation into the circumstances surrounding the arrest of a student at Spring Valley High School. We look forward to the FBI, US Attorney Office and the Dept of Justice for collecting all available facts and evidence in order to determine whether a federal law was violated. Sheriff Leon Lott was wise to insist upon an external investigation into what he observed to be “very disturbing” in the videos.

“The AME Church will shrink not from being that conscience stirring role for the nation once again” added AME Senior Bishop John R Bryant. “Our entire church will remain vigilant in monitoring the outcome of the investigations,” continued Bishop Julius McAlister, president of the AME Council of Bishops. “Race relations will not improve with the passage of legislation alone; it will also require a change of heart and thinking. The faith community must lead, and be the conscience of the nation”, proclaimed Bishop Richard F. Norris, presiding bishop – AME Church, in the state of South Carolina and president of the church’s General Board. “We call upon every church, temple, mosque, and faith communion to commit anew to do everything we can to end benign neglect that includes ignoring, tolerating and accepting racism and to make a commitment to end racism by the example of our lives and actions,” continued Bishop Jackson. “The Social Action Commission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church joins national civic leadership in commending students Tony Robinson, Jr. and Aisha Thomas, whose courage to record the incidents that led to public exposure of this act of violence, and Niya Kenny whose protective intervention showed bravery in the face of potential personal harm,” concludes Jacquelyn Dupont-Walker, AME Social Action Officer. ##