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Campaign Zero Backs California Bill Banning Term Used to Justify & Undermine Accountability for Excessive Use of Force by Police

“Excited Delirium” has been used to justify the use of excessive force by police, particularly young Black men in California and across the country

(March 10, 2023) – Campaign Zero, a non-profit organization dedicated to ending police violence in America and creating a world beyond policing, issued the following statement of support for “An act to add Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 24400) to Division 20 of the Health and Safety Code, relating to excited delirium” (CA AB360), sponsored by Assemblymember Mike Gipson. The bill seeks to ban the use of the term “Excited Delirium” in California, which has been used to justify the excessive use of force by law enforcement. Campaign Zero’s Managing Director for Research & Data, [Abdul Nasser Rad](#), stated the following in support of [CA AB360](#):

“This bill would make California the first state to take this necessary and critical step to reduce harm, improve accountability, and combat the use of race science to ensure safety and justice for all.

This manufactured term has been used to justify the excessive use of force by law enforcement, [disproportionately applied to Black and Hispanic victims](#), including in the tragic and unnecessary death of Angelo Quinto, whose life ended in December 2020 when two Antioch, CA, police officers pressed their knees into Quinto’s back. In August 2021, a pathologist for the county ruled the cause of death was “Excited Delirium,” rather than the physical force applied by the police officers. Unfortunately, Quinto’s case is similar to the tragedies of [Daniel Prude](#) (Rochester, NY), [Elijah McClain](#) (Aurora, CO), and many other victims of police violence where the medical cause of death was “Excited Delirium.”

As the Assembly considers this bill, Campaign Zero applauds the steps taken by the [Bay Area Rapid Transit \(BART\)](#) police to remove the term “Excited Delirium” from the departmental policy manual and urges policymakers to follow suit. However, we also urge that legislators tackle concerns around how the term is institutionalized and take the necessary steps to prevent any substitution of the term or diagnosis to justify police violence or undermine accountability.”

Background

Physicians for Human Rights released a [report](#) in March 2022 that summarizes the majority of concerns with the term and the history of the term: “The term has come to be used as a catch-all for deaths occurring in the context of law enforcement restraint, often coinciding with substance use or mental illness, and disproportionately used to justify the deaths of young Black men in police encounters.”

- A 2020 *Florida Today* report found that at least [62 percent of deaths](#) attributed to “excited delirium” involved the use of force by law enforcement, and a related study found that Black people comprised a massively disproportionate amount (43.3%) of deaths in police custody attributable to “excited delirium.”
- An article published in the University of Virginia Law Review by UC Berkeley’s Dr. Osagie K. Obasogie, Professor of Law and Bioethics, revealed that a review of a sample of incidents of police violence categorized as police violence, found that [56% of incidents](#) were Black or Latinx victims.

Leading medical authorities (i.e. [American Psychiatric Association](#), [World Health Organization](#), and the [American Medical Association](#)) do not recognize “Excited Delirium” as a valid medical diagnosis. Additionally, historical investigations have found that the diagnosis has racist roots, has been cited as “[junk science](#),” and was [spread across the country](#) by TASER International (now Axon Enterprise). Two statements from leading medical authorities surrounding Excited Delirium are captured below:

- [The American Medical Association \(AMA\)](#): “Confirms the AMA’s stance that current evidence does not support “excited delirium” as an official diagnosis, and opposes its use until a clear set of diagnostic criteria has been established”
- [American Psychiatric Association \(APA\)](#): The term “excited delirium” is nonspecific, lacks clear diagnostic criteria, and should not be used as a diagnosis until such criteria are validated, according to a position statement adopted by the APA Board of Trustees in December 2020.

To learn more, Campaign Zero has produced an [audio learning program](#).