

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Thursday, May 28, 2020

Farhio Khalif Biography ..... 2-3  
Farhio Khalif Testimony ..... 4-8  
Susan Hutson Biography ..... 9  
Susan Hutson Testimony ..... 10-13  
Amy Blasher Biography ..... 14

## Farhio Khalif

Founder and Executive Director of Voice of East African Women in Minnesota



Farhio was born in Somalia, Moved to Italy at young age her mom sent her to live with her sister, who does trading business between Italy and Somalia then her sister left and Farhio was raised by a catholic priest, at this age she was raised to love humanity and work hard to make the smile infaces.

She made stops along the way, About 10 years ago, she arrived in Minneapolis which she decided as her destination in order to join its vibrant Somali community. Farhio is a well-known and recognized leader in the East African and Somali communities. She is particularly known for her leadership role in representing and advocating for East African women and children.

She is the founder and Executive Director of Voice of East African Women (VEAW) non-profit organization founded in 2012 by Farhio khalif to offer shelter, support, advocacy, prevention and education services to survivors of violence as well as to help create a community to overcome abuse and succeed in their renewed lives. We know that the development of this comfort zone is critical, as cultural and language barriers are severe and severe to dissuade East African and Muslim women from seeking services that they need in the outside world. VEAW offers also Healing Hands Wellness Center to care for women, and families.

In September 2017 VEAW opened Farhio House shelter for homeless domestic sexual abuse center for East African women, children, and all women; and has started a healing and wellness center for women, a domestic abuse advocacy program that navigates the many complicated systems that impact victims, and regular Circle of Mothers meetings where East African women explore issues and concerns. Farhio has made VEAW a strong, viable organization for East African women and children.

Since 2013 Ms. Khalif at Voice of East African Women (VEAW) has been organizing and advocating for women and youth issues and building bridges between the Somali community and the law enforcement community. She worked closely with the US Attorney, the law enforcement and Imams to hold town hall meetings to bring the community together to build relationship and to address Issues such as female genital mutilation, (FGM) discrimination, terror youth recruitment, hate crime and Islamophobia.

Ms. Khalif is a survivor of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and she is a tireless advocate for prevention of FGM. She has also produced and hosted a Somali language TV show addressing the many issues facing the Somali community in Minnesota.

She is currently President of the St. Paul Branch of the NAACP and second vice president of the MN/Dakota Area Conference NAACP. She has served as the Political Action Chair of the MN/Dakota Area Conference NAACP, She is a member of United Black Legislative Agenda-UBLA, Member of Somali American Partnership. And co-chaired the Somali American Task Force

**Written Testimony**

**To**

**The Presidential Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice**

**May 28, 2020**

**By**

**Farhio Khalif**

**Founder and CEO of Voice of East African Women (VEAW)**

**President of the St. Paul Branch of the NAACP**

**Bush Foundation Fellow**

I was born in Jilib, Somalia and for 15 years was part of a society in which men held all the power and decision-making authority; where men could have multiple wives while women's roles were to bear children and serve the men; and where men could easily divorce a wife leaving the woman economically vulnerable and socially isolated. During those 15 years I was beaten whenever I had an independent thought or did something reserved only for boys and men, like riding a bicycle or climbing a tree. At age 8 I was subjected to the culturally accepted practice of female circumcision, more appropriately labeled Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). At age 14 it was decided by my father that I should marry an older man which would have taken me from school and set me on a course of early and frequent childbearing. Fortunately, my mother recognized in me the need and the ability to do more, so she surreptitiously helped me flee the country to preserve my physical and emotional health.

My childhood experiences were the experiences of every young girl in my hometown. Growing up in Jilib, I saw firsthand the toll that being voiceless and devalued took on the hopes and dreams of all those girls. I saw their spirits dulled and many of their talents and skills wasted. I saw the sadness in their eyes as they realized that everything in their community conspired against them being anything but wives and mothers. I also saw the physical and psychological consequences of FGM on these girls and the risks this created years later when they were giving birth to their children.

Even at the age of 8, experiencing Female Genital Mutilation brought into sharp focus the differences between religion and culture, power, and vulnerability, right and wrong. I knew in my soul that what had been done to me was wrong – in so many ways. Yet, it was celebrated as a significant “rite of passage” in our community. The physical and emotional effects of FGM impact me even today and the dissonance that it created in my mind still resonates. All those childhood experiences energize the work that I do to eliminate the practice of FGM and give voice to the voiceless women in my community.

In 2010, after spending some time in Italy and in the state of Virginia, I came to Minnesota which has the largest Somali population in the United States. When I arrived in Minnesota, I realized that Somali women in this country face some of the same issues as they did in their native land. They continue to be economically dependent on their husbands and suffer severe poverty and isolation if they are divorced. Housing and food insecurity have become a major concern among women who have become separated from their husbands. Women continue to experience domestic abuse at unacceptable levels. Community members tell me that Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) continues to be practiced even though it is illegal in this country. Women continue to struggle to have their voices heard.

In trying to build a life in a new country, immigrant women in Minnesota also face some new challenges. Language is a huge barrier to accessing the information needed to succeed in U.S. society. It is a barrier to education and to accessing needed health and social services. The stresses and bureaucratic challenges of being an immigrant in a country that has become less tolerant and accepting of immigrants has taken an emotional toll, particularly on the women. Combine that with a growing level of Islamophobia and hate crimes and you get an increasing level of fear and anxiety about venturing out into the larger society. Linked with that is the fear of radicalization of their children by ISIS and other terrorist groups.

Since coming to Minnesota, I have been working diligently to honor my mother's sacrifice and her desire that I give voice to voiceless women and children. It is because of her and my love of helping women and children that I do the work that I do and why I established Voice of East African Women (VEAW), an organization dedicated to empowering women to overcome and prevent future abuse and provide the support needed to help women and their children succeed. As part of that effort, Farhio House Shelter was established in 2017. It is the first shelter for East African women in the state of Minnesota and a place where women and their children find safety, shelter, counseling, and other services to improve their health and well-being. Domestic abuse advocates working out of the shelter and the Hennepin and Ramsey County family courts, provide support to many women who are facing homelessness and abuse and help them navigate the complicated systems that are impacting their lives.

VEAW and Farhio House also serve as the hub of culturally sensitive services that provides advocacy to help women navigate systems and gain information about and referral to other community agencies. VEAW also has available the "Helping Hands Wellness Center" which provides healing and wellness services for East African Women and for any woman, no matter where she is from, who needs these services.

To address the unique challenge of recruitment of Somali youth to terrorist organizations, VEAW has sponsored community forums and discussions to bring Somali mothers together with Minnesota's Governor, state representatives, the U.S. Attorney, and many branches of law enforcement to open a path of communication. These meetings have empowered women to take a more active role in defining problems and solutions. In addition, a monthly "Circle of Mothers

Roundtable” brings together women in a supportive environment where they can discuss issues and concerns that impact them. This has met an urgent need for East African women to have a place where they can be safe, experience the healing that they need, and be empowered to deal with the challenges in their lives. They find support by connecting with other women facing similar challenges.

What I’ve learned in all of these efforts is that many of the issues faced by the Somali community: economic insecurity, poor educational achievement, unstable and unsafe housing, racism, and disrespect by law enforcement are not unique to our community but are shared by other communities of color and indigenous peoples. That is why I’ve become involved with the St. Paul NAACP and other advocacy organizations working to raise the voice of the voiceless and bring affected communities to the decision-making and policy-making tables that impact the health and well-being of our communities.

In my work I’ve become aware of some of the things necessary to improve the health and welfare of these communities – things that the Presidential Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice should know about as it prepares its recommendations to the Attorney General and the President.

Most importantly, trust needs to be developed between law enforcement and minority communities. This can only occur when law enforcement engages in active listening to community needs and community ideas. Too often law enforcement assumes to know the reasons for and the answers to a community’s problems before verifying those assumptions with the community. Developing mutually respectful relationships with community leaders is the first step in the process of building trust. Getting to a point where law enforcement trusts community leadership and vice versa, is an essential element in preventing, reducing, and addressing the problems in a community.

However, trust is difficult to build when too often we experience events like that which occurred on Memorial Day when an African American was killed by a Minneapolis police officer. Most African Americans and African Immigrants have a distrust of law enforcement because they believe that the police are out to get them even if they did nothing wrong. They believe police will either arrest them or even kill them without justification. Addressing this urgent issue should be the top priority of the Commission and in doing that it must be as a partnership between law enforcement and community leaders from the African American and African Immigrant communities.

The Commission should also understand that community leaders are not restricted to just the men of the community. Most often, women are the best source of information about community needs, expectations, ideas, and opportunities. For example, when we created a group of “Mothers Against Youth Recruitment” we were able to successfully develop the partnerships necessary between the community, families, and law enforcement that helped mitigate the problem.

Without the involvement of women, families would have been hurt and antagonism between law enforcement and the community would have increased.

No one organization or agency by itself has the capacity or ability to do all the things necessary to create a healthy and thriving community. Partnerships are essential – partnerships within a community; partnerships between diverse communities; partnerships with organizations in different sectors; and partnerships between local, state, regional, and federal agencies. Sadly, too often issues of power, control, turf, and finances turn potential partnerships into confrontational relationships. All this does is further divide organizations and communities and exacerbate existing problems.

To rectify or prevent this situation, there must be “bridge builders” – people (both men and women) who are willing to work outside of their organizational, professional, or community siloes to foster, create, and strengthen partnerships. Most communities have some well-know bridge builders and these individuals need to be supported. In addition, agencies who work with a particular community could enhance bridge building by hiring individuals from that community. The relationship between law enforcement and the African American community is the most pressing and urgent example of where bridge builders are needed. Simply hiring and training more individuals (particularly women) from these communities to serve in those communities would be a powerful step in gaining trust and building the needed bridges.

Because the problems facing minority communities are sometimes large and seemingly intractable, governmental, and non-governmental funding agencies too often look to large organizations to address those problems, leaving small organizations struggling for survival. Experience has shown me that small organizations often understand the issues of the community better than anyone else and are amazingly effective in navigating community politics and building community capacity to make change. They are often led and staffed by people from the community and who know the community. However, their small staffs make it difficult for them to compete with larger organizations for grants and contracts. For example, a small organization like Voice of East African Women (VEAW) has a great track record of building bridges between law enforcement and the community yet does not have the staff to navigate the complexity and bureaucracy of grant applications. With limited resources we focus on providing urgent and needed services at the expense of efforts to raise necessary funds to keep us operating. Even though the larger organizations occasionally contract with small community organizations, the overall leadership of the efforts comes from outside the community while the real need is for community leadership. Governmental and foundation funders should remodel their grant procedures to give small community-based organizations a better chance to secure the funding that is vital to their survival and the well-being of the communities they serve.

One of the major issues facing minority communities, especially African American communities, is the number of people who are incarcerated. Having so many people extricated from their communities leads to family degradation, economic deterioration, and a sense of hopelessness

and despair. It is common knowledge that African Americans are disproportionately incarcerated regardless of the metric used. This has been a disaster for these communities. While this is a complex issue, the COVID-19 pandemic has given us an example that should stimulate us to rethink many of the policies of our criminal justice system. If we can release incarcerated individuals from prison during a national crisis, why can't we do that in face of an on-going community crisis? It also raises the question, why are so many people from these communities there in the first place? These are questions, among many others, I urge the Commission to address.

Finally, as I said at the beginning, my life's work is to raise the voice of the voiceless and bring affected communities to the decision-making and policy-making tables that impact their health and well-being. I cannot end my testimony without mentioning that Female Genital Mutilation continues to be one of the most blatant examples of what needs to change. Although it is illegal in the United States, community members tell me it is still occurring, perpetuated by cultural norms in many societies and performed in this country by secret practitioners or by returning to their home country for the procedure. While many want to punish the parents of the child the real problem is the cultural norm that keeps this practice alive. If anyone is to be punished, it should be the practitioner of this violent procedure, but the real effort should be to educate communities that this is not a practice condoned by any religion but rather a cultural tradition that has significant negative consequences. Law enforcement could play a major role in helping address and change these cultural norms.

For over 400 years African American communities have been denied many of the benefits that our society provides to white and wealthy inhabitants. That has resulted in health, social, educational, and economic disparities that are unconscionable in a country that is as rich as ours and founded on the principle that all people are created equal. COVID-19 is showing us that these disparities must be a concern for all of us, not just the minority population, because we are recognizing that no one will be safe from the pandemic until everyone is safe. Fortunately, the broader community is recognizing that this is true for all health, social, and economic issues not just for COVID-19 and is finally taking to heart what Frederick Douglas highlighted 150 years ago when he said; *"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."* It is this understanding that we are all in this struggle together and that health and well-being will be achieved only when everyone is included in our definition of community that gives me encouragement to keep working and gives me hope for the future.

Thank you for your attention.



## Susan Hutson

President of the Board of Directors National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE)



The City of New Orleans Office of the Independent Police Monitor welcomed Susan Hutson as the Independent Police Monitor in June of 2010.

Prior to accepting the position in New Orleans, Ms. Hutson worked at the Los Angeles Police Commission's Office of the Inspector General as an Assistant Inspector General and as the Acting Police Monitor at the Office of the Police Monitor in Austin, Texas.

Prior to working in police oversight, Ms. Hutson was a general practitioner, defense counsel, prosecutor, and assistant city attorney handling labor matters.

Ms. Hutson holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a J.D. from Tulane University School of Law.

Ms. Hutson was elected to a two-year term as the President of the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE) in September of 2019 and is a Past-President of the International Law Enforcement Auditors Association (ILEAA).

## **Statement of the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement**

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE), I want to express my thanks for this important invitation from the President's Commission on Law and the Administration of Justice.

We are looking forward to an informative and collaborative sharing of information with the Commission and wish the Commission success in its mission to equitably change our criminal justice system for the benefit of law enforcement and all other community stakeholders.

Established in 1995, NACOLE is a non-profit organization that works to enhance accountability, transparency, and community trust in law enforcement. In the United States, NACOLE is the preeminent civilian oversight association and our members and Board of Directors are the leading experts in civilian oversight.

NACOLE supports our members, some of whom are current and former law enforcement, in a number of important ways. Our annual conference brings together the growing community of civilian oversight practitioners, law enforcement officials and other accountability experts to meet and exchange information and ideas about issues facing civilian oversight and law enforcement. Topics that we have discussed include trauma informed policing and policing during national emergencies.

In addition to the annual conference, NACOLE provides member support and training throughout the year with regional training opportunities, pertinent and ongoing research, and outreach, as well providing resources and community specific training to jurisdictions creating oversight and those reviewing the authority of civilian oversight agencies.

Finally, NACOLE's support of our membership often includes opining on effective independent civilian oversight practice legislation and subsequent support for increased independence, authority, and resources to ensure effective oversight practice. More information about NACOLE can be found on our website, [www.nacole.org](http://www.nacole.org).

NACOLE would like to thank the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) for their support of NACOLE's report "Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement: Report on the State of the Field and Effective Oversight Practices." This report is expected to be published in the coming months.

This important project highlights the need for civilian oversight of law enforcement as an effective component in public safety. The stated goal of this Commission is to "serve the important function of studying ways to make American law enforcement the most trusted and effective guardians of our communities." As the NACOLE report states, "civilian oversight of law enforcement is a mechanism that builds greater trust between the community and law enforcement by promoting accountability, transparency, and legitimacy."



## **Respect for Law Enforcement**

Over the past decade, viral videos of seemingly routine police encounters depicting tragedy have sent shockwaves through both communities and law enforcement agencies across the country, setting off a national conversation on the relationship communities have with law enforcement. At the national level, these encounters have coincided with reduced public confidence in American policing, particularly among youth and minority populations. While low levels of trust have existed in certain communities throughout history, the most recent wave of high-profile incidents has prompted widespread calls to meaningfully address issues of community concern, such as officer-involved shootings and excessive use of force, discriminatory policing, aggressive crime fighting strategies, and fair accountability for misconduct.

Across the nation, law enforcement leaders, academics, and government officials have seemingly reached a consensus that addressing such issues with a focus on public trust and legitimacy are integral to fair and effective public safety in an increasingly diverse nation.

The response by local and state governments, law enforcement executives, community groups, and technical advisors to the challenge of mending police-community relations have been significant. In the aftermath of unrest in Ferguson, MO and elsewhere, President Barack Obama established the Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing to identify policing practices that promote public safety and build community trust in law enforcement. The Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, published in May 2015, recommended that civilian oversight of law enforcement be established in accordance with the needs of the community and input from local law enforcement stakeholders. In addition, it offered several recommendations, including many relating to public trust, procedural justice, and legitimacy; accountability and transparency; community policing efforts; and the inclusion of community members in policy development, training programs, and review of force incidents.

Civilian oversight of law enforcement can contribute significantly to the development of public trust, legitimacy, cooperation, and collaboration necessary to improve police-community relations and enhance public safety.

Community efforts to address the issue of police-community relations increasingly include civilian oversight of law enforcement as a means of building trust and legitimacy for law enforcement. Traditionally, high-profile incidents have spawned the creation of new or strengthened civilian oversight. Decisionmakers in jurisdictions throughout the country are increasingly establishing civilian oversight proactively in recognition of its ability to promote public trust in law enforcement and reduce exposure to the risks of misconduct.

At its core, civilian oversight can be broadly defined as the independent, external, and ongoing review of a law enforcement agency and its operations by individuals outside of the law enforcement agency being overseen. Civilian oversight may entail, but is not limited to, the independent investigation of complaints alleging officer misconduct, auditing or monitoring various aspects of the overseen law enforcement agency, analyzing patterns or trends in activity,



issuing public reports and conducting broad stakeholder engagement, and issuing recommendations on discipline, training, policies, and procedures. Taken together, these functions can promote greater law enforcement accountability, increased transparency, positive organizational change, and improved responsiveness to community needs and concerns.

By acting as an independent and neutral body reviewing the work of the law enforcement agency and its sworn staff, civilian oversight of law enforcement offers a unique element of legitimacy that internal accountability and review mechanisms simply cannot. Because civilian oversight agencies operate outside of the overseen law enforcement agency, and report to local stakeholders outside of its chain of command, the findings and reports of an oversight agency are free from the real or perceived biases that are often the source of mistrust in a law enforcement agency's internal systems. Similarly, a civilian oversight agency's impartiality, neutrality, adherence to findings of fact can alleviate officer skepticism in internal systems and bolster procedural fairness within the law enforcement agency as a whole.

The organizational structure and authority of the civilian oversight agencies in the United States vary widely. While civilian oversight agencies can be broadly categorized, no two oversight agencies are exactly alike. There is no one-size-fits-all approach that makes one form of civilian oversight better than another.

Effective civilian oversight systems will reflect the particular needs of their local partners and incorporate feedback from community members, law enforcement and their unions, and government stakeholders in order to achieve the most sustainable and appropriate structure. As the field of civilian oversight grows in sophistication, cities are frequently combining various aspects of traditional models of oversight to produce forms best-suited for their local context.

On a daily basis, our membership work with law enforcement and other community and governmental stakeholders on matters related to the Commission's working groups, including:

- Social Problems Impacting Public Safety, such as persons who are homeless and suffering from mental illness;
- Law Enforcement Recruitment & Training, in areas such as de-escalation, CIT, trauma-informed policing, improved tactics, and least necessary force;
- Police Officer Health, including officer wellness, early intervention services, as well as supporting anti-retaliation measures for officers who seek help and/or denounce inappropriate policing;
- Reduction of Crime, through community led policing initiatives and procedural justice principles;
- Criminal Justice System Personnel Intersection and Victim Services, including working groups made up of prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, police, advocates, and crime victims;
- Juvenile Justice and Youth Crime, including alternatives to detaining children, harm reduction and trauma informed care, and responsive rehabilitation initiatives.



- Data and Reporting, including one of the most important core tenets of oversight, transparency.

NACOLE was founded on the belief that effective independent civilian oversight leads to more effective policing and safer communities. NACOLE firmly believes that an investment in strong, independent oversight is an investment in public safety and an investment in law enforcement. While the establishment of civilian oversight alone cannot restore law enforcement's legitimacy, it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain public trust without it. As such, developing effective and adequately resourced civilian oversight is among the several strategies that must be employed to rebuild community relations with law enforcement.

Again, I am thankful for the opportunity to address the Commission on behalf of the members of the National Association of Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement. I look forward to working with the Commission and the Department of Justice to advance effective practice and policy for fair and accountable comm



## Amy Blasher

Crime Statistics Management Unit, Federal Bureau of Investigation



Amy C. Blasher is the Unit Chief of the Crime Statistics Management Unit in the Global Law Enforcement Support Section of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Criminal Justice Information Services Division. She is the program manager for the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program and manages the FBI's Crime Data Modernization initiative which was tasked in February 2015, to improve the nation's UCR crime statistics for reliability, accuracy, accessibility, and timeliness.

Ms. Blasher joined the FBI in 1995; throughout her FBI tenure, she has held many senior leadership roles in addition to the FBI UCR Program. Ms. Blasher was assigned to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) Section and was involved in many policy and new initiative developments. Additional senior leadership roles held by Ms. Blasher have included oversight of the NICS Quality Assurance Program, legal administrative functions, and liaison/outreach activities.

During her tenure, Ms. Blasher has received the Outstanding Supervision/Manager in an Administrative Series award at the 2012 Excellence in Government Awards Program, recognized by the Pittsburgh Federal Executive Board. Ms. Blasher received the Silver Award for Outstanding Supervisor in an Administrative Series and the Outstanding Team Award for the National Use-of-Force Data Collection Team at the 2017 Excellence in Government Awards Program. Most recently, Ms. Blasher received the 2018 Assistant Director Award for Outstanding Program Management.

Ms. Blasher graduated from West Virginia University in 1994 with a Bachelor of Arts and Science in Liberal Arts.