

## **An Open Letter to UC Berkeley Students, Faculty, Administration & Regents from the UC Berkeley Police Officers' Association**

It is our hope that this letter will help open the door to a better understanding between UC Berkeley police and the University community.

The UC Berkeley Police Officers' Association, representing approximately 64 campus police officers, understands your frustration over massive tuition hikes and budget cuts, and we fully support your right to peacefully protest to bring about change.

It was not our decision to engage campus protesters on November 9th. We are now faced with "managing" the results of years of poor budget planning. Please know we are not your enemy.

A video clip gone viral does not depict the full story or the facts leading up to an actual incident. Multiple dispersal requests were given in the days and hours before the tent removal operation. Not caught on most videos were scenes of protesters hitting, pushing, grabbing officers' batons, fighting back with backpacks and skateboards.

The UC Berkeley Police Officers' Association supports a full investigation of the events that took place on November 9<sup>th</sup>, as well as a full review of University policing policies. That being said, we do not abrogate responsibility for the events on November 9<sup>th</sup>.

UC Berkeley police officers want to better serve students and faculty members and we welcome ideas for how we can have a better discourse to avoid future confrontations. We are open to all suggestions on ways we can improve our ability to better protect and serve the UC Berkeley community.

As your campus police, we also have safety concerns that we ask you to consider.

Society has changed significantly since 1964 when peaceful UC Berkeley student protesters organized a 10-hour sit-in in Sproul Hall and 10,000 students held a police car at bay – spawning change and the birth of our nation's Free Speech Movement.

However proud we can all be of UC Berkeley's contribution to free speech in America, no one can deny this: Our society in 2011 has become an extremely more violent place to live and to protect. No one understands the effects of this violence more than those of us in law enforcement.

Disgruntled citizens in this day and age express their frustrations in far more violent ways – with knives, with guns and sometimes by killing innocent bystanders. Peaceful protests can, in an instant, turn into violent rioting, ending in destruction of property or worse – the loss of lives. Police officers and innocent citizens everywhere are being injured, and in some instances, killed.

In the back of every police officer's mind is this: How can I control this incident so it does not escalate into a seriously violent, potentially life-threatening event for all involved?

While students were calling the protest "non-violent," the events on November 9<sup>th</sup> were anything but nonviolent. In previous student Occupy protests, protesters hit police officers with chairs, bricks, spitting, and using homemade plywood shields as weapons – with documented injuries to officers.

At a moment's notice, the November 9<sup>th</sup> protest at UC Berkeley could have turned even more violent than it did, much like the Occupy protests in neighboring Oakland.

Please understand that by no means are we interested in making excuses. We are only hoping that you will understand and consider the frustrations we experience daily as public safety officers sworn to uphold the law. It is our job to keep protests from escalating into violent events where lives could be endangered.

We sincerely ask for your help in doing this.

Like you, we have been victims to budget cuts that affect our children and our families in real ways. We, too, hold on to the dream of being able to afford to send our children and grandchildren to a four-year university. Like you, we understand and fully support the need for change and a redirection of priorities.

To students and faculty: As 10,000 students surrounded a police car on campus in 1964, protesters passed the hat to help pay for repairs to the police car as a show of respect. Please peacefully respect the rules we are required to enforce – for all our safety and protection. Please respect the requests of our officers as we try to do our jobs.

To the University Administration and Regents: Please don't ask us to enforce your policies then refuse to stand by us when we do. Your students, your faculty and your police – we need you to provide real leadership.

We openly and honestly ask the UC Berkeley community for the opportunity to move forward together, peacefully and without further incident – in better understanding of one another. Thank you for listening.