

To Dr. Pushpa Iyer, Professor Edward Laurance  
and anyone else it may concern:

On October 9th, Salinas Police Chief Kelly McMillin is scheduled to speak on a panel titled “Police Legitimacy in Communities of Color” presented by the Center for Conflict Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Under Chief McMillin’s command, four unarmed Salinas community members -- all Latino men -- were shot and killed by officers in a span of four months. Between March and July of 2014, Salinas police officers shot and murdered Angel Ruiz, Carlos Mejia, Osman Hernandez, and our dear friend and activist Frank Alvarado. Mejia and Hernandez were allegedly shot because officers felt threatened by work tools that they were carrying. Ruiz had a pellet gun, and Alvarado had a cell phone.

We believe it is unethical and disrespectful to give Chief McMillin such a privileged voice in a space that is uncritical of his department’s policies and the violence he has continually justified. None of the community activists, family and friends of the murdered men were invited to present on the panel and likely view the space as hostile -- given that they would have had to sit across from the person ultimately responsible for these deaths.

Chief McMillin did ask the Department of Justice to investigate some of the murders, but not all of them. In any event, law enforcement and county officials have been extremely slow to take any significant actions to demonstrate that they take this series of deaths seriously, or to address police brutality more broadly in Salinas. Instead, Kelly McMillin has been actively justifying the murders; by saying in a recent Town Hall that, “to characterize the people who were shot as innocent victims is a disservice. To call the Salinas police officers who were involved in these things killers is a disservice and, frankly, an insult.”<sup>1</sup> With these words, Chief McMillin is repeating a pattern that we have seen across the country, from the murder of Oscar Grant and Alan Blueford in Oakland to Mike Brown in Ferguson and countless others. These premature deaths all have one thing in common: they were all unarmed victims of police violence who are demonized by the police and corporate media as criminal and unreputable men destined to die at the hands of police because they had nothing positive to offer their families and communities. We reject this narrative -- the men who died had families, friends and comrades in struggle who cared about them. Any mistakes that they may or may not have made in the past do not justify their murder at the hands of police.

We are not surprised that McMillin has been speaking out against the idea of a civilian oversight board and has instead encouraged city council to simply “update” an already-existing Police Community Advisory Committee. When he expressed concern at the cost of creating an actual citizens’ board, he said that “in the grand scheme of things, the city needs a lot more police officers... before something like a civilian oversight board.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, he is calling for the *expansion* of a system that we are currently very skeptical about, that we are trying to hold accountable for immense wrongdoing. And he is trying to do this *instead of* agreeing to actual oversight.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/2014/08/15/salinas-police-chief-officer-speak-town-hall/14095961/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/2014/09/29/chief-mcmillin-revamp-salinas-police-advisory-committ ee/16452173/>

The Salinas police chief who oversaw the killings of four Latino men in four months is not welcome in our communities. We demand that all involved Salinas police officers be held accountable, including Chief McMillin and those officers identified by SPD as killing residents in 2014. We support the families' call to investigate anti-Latino discrimination and violation of federal rights. **More broadly, we call on our community to stop giving Chief McMillin a platform to espouse militarization policies that disrupt and destroy the lives of Salinas residents.** Stop promoting the view that the police are legitimate and honorable members of the Salinas community. Prioritize the voice of community activists and family members of people victimized by the police, especially when organizing events that explore the impact of policing and militarization.

Inviting Chief McMillin onto this panel will not initiate an honest or productive discussion about the relationship between police and communities of color. To the contrary, his presence would itself be an act of legitimizing police brutality in communities of color. **For these reasons, we request that you ask him to step down as a participant.**

Sincerely,  
Sin Barras & The Alvarado Family

Sin Barras is a community-based group out of Santa Cruz, California that works to eradicate the prison industrial-complex.

<http://sinbarras.org>

Signed by:

The Bay Area Stop Mass Incarceration Network

Critical Race & Ethnic Studies Student Working Group, UC Santa Cruz

Ana Barrera, Salinas Educator & EON/BAMN Caucus Member

Angelica Garza, Frank Alvarado's sister

Anthony D. Prince, National Executive Committee, National Lawyers Guild

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Sharon Martinas, Catalyst Project