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GOALS:
UN-BIASED
TRANSPARENT
THOROUGH

2 OVERARCHING TASKS

1 "ROAD MAP" REPORT

CASE STUDY

Leading a sensitive investigation into POLICE CONDUCT

Our Client's Challenge

After the death of George Floyd in May 2020, protests occurred around the country, including in Huntsville, Alabama. Following complaints about the Huntsville Police Department's conduct during the protests, the Huntsville Police Citizens Advisory Council (HPCAC) launched an investigation. The oversight body engaged Lightfoot's [Liz Huntley](#) and [Jack Sharman](#) to serve as independent counsel for the review.



Elizabeth H. Huntley
Sr. Counsel

Huntley is well known across Alabama for her advocacy work and community involvement, particularly on issues involving children and other vulnerable groups. She's also served on several government task forces,



Jack Sharman III
Partner

including one that reviewed Alabama's gambling laws. For his part, Sharman has led highly visible and controversial investigations, most notably the impeachment probe of a former Alabama governor. He was also a special counsel during the Whitewater investigation of President Clinton and was recently appointed by the Governor of Georgia as special counsel to the Georgia Secretary of State's Office for an inquiry into the 2020 presidential election.

The Lightfoot team's task in Huntsville was significant. Given the high-profile nature of the inquiry, which had many stakeholders, the HPCAC wanted to hear from as

many people as possible about what they had witnessed. Such "listening sessions" ensured that the investigation would present a clear and comprehensive picture of the events and the resulting police response.

The HPCAC wanted the inquiry to be an unassailable, unbiased, and unflinching look at what happened. It also asked Lightfoot to recommend policy and procedure changes regarding anything the investigation found problematic or troubling. The process also had to be as open as possible to ensure that the final product earned the trust of the community. The review would be, as Huntley noted during her opening remarks when she delivered the final report, a textbook example of "democracy at work."

“DEMOCRACY AT WORK”

Our Approach

The first task before Huntley, Sharman and the entire Lightfoot team was to assemble every bit of evidence and testimony available, including a review of almost 280 hours of police bodycam footage. Huntley and Sharman also organized two public listening sessions for the HPCAC where all witnesses were invited to come forward. The sessions were carried live on local television networks. The events were held at different times of the day to maximize attendance, regardless of work schedules and other personal responsibilities. There were also separate listening sessions for specific stakeholder groups, such as police reform advocates.

Because the inquiry took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lightfoot team wanted to ensure every witness could provide testimony, even if someone did not feel comfortable coming to a large, in-person event. The firm's [Case Clarity group](#) launched a [website](#) where people could not only upload written statements but also videos and photos from the protests. This platform, combined with a site initially set up by the HPCAC, resulted in more than 800 submissions.

Collecting evidence was the first hurdle, but the greater challenge was to review and evaluate that evidence, produce an accurate report and offer practical recommendations. To guide this effort, the Lightfoot team researched other investigations into police responses across the country to George Floyd protests. The HPCAC inquiry adopted best practices from other investigations and avoided gaps where others had not thoroughly assessed the facts, the relevant policies and the law.



The Result

Because of its scope, the HPCAC inquiry took nearly a year to complete. Both the HPCAC and the Lightfoot team felt the matter deserved a significant amount of time and attention to hear from stakeholders, address the issues and prepare a sound written report.

On April 22, 2021, Huntley [detailed the HPCAC's findings](#) in a presentation to the Huntsville City Council, carried live on local television. She outlined the exhaustive process that the HPCAC went through, laid out the findings, and proposed specific recommended actions. The [full 248-page report](#) was also published online.

During [interviews](#) after Huntley's presentation, the Huntsville mayor called the report “a roadmap” and noted he had been writing down the recommendations as she spoke. The city also took immediate action on several of the report's findings.

While there is still much to be done in terms of implementing the HPCAC's recommendations, Huntley, Sharman, and the Lightfoot team conducted an unbiased, transparent investigation that heard all sides. In doing so, they protected the integrity of the process and made the HPCAC's report acceptable to the community.

About Lightfoot, Franklin & White LLC

Trusted by clients and respected by opponents, Lightfoot is a leading national litigation firm. True to its “**Trial Tough, Solution Savvy**” philosophy, Lightfoot was named a “**Top 20 Trial Law Firm**” in the U.S. by Benchmark Litigation in 2019, 2020 and 2021. Working from offices in Birmingham and Houston, the firm's 60+ lawyers are known for their work involving complex, bet-the-company litigation; internal and government investigations; risk management; and compliance counsel, including NCAA matters, for clients across the country and around the world. For more information, visit lightfootlaw.com and connect with us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).



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