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Law That Shields Bad Cops From Liability Needs to Be Changed

Amid anti-racism protests nationwide and police-reform efforts, there is no time like the present to take a close look at "qualified immunity"—a legal doctrine that can restrict citizens' ability to recover damages for civil rights violations by shielding government officials from lawsuits and civil liability.

In light of current high profile police brutality incidents around the country, the term is far from esoteric legalese and the idea of whether the country should stop protecting officials who break the law is highly debated. While the U.S. Supreme Court in June rejected seven opportunities to rule on qualified immunity's continued vitality, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act (H.R. 7120) in June. The bill would end qualified immunity for law enforcement officers. In the Senate, a bill has been introduced that would eliminate qualified immunity and separate legislation would significantly reform the doctrine.

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