



BEXAR COUNTY
PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE
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STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE PEACEFUL PROTESTORS DEMANDING JUSTICE

The killing of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer has left too many in our community at a loss for words. However, the time for silence from our elected and appointed officials, law enforcement, our citizens and the media is long past. The existence of two societies and two systems of criminal justice, one black and one white is not new. Black drivers are three times more likely to be searched during a traffic stop than white drivers.¹ African-Americans are more likely to be held in jail while awaiting trial.² The imprisonment rate of black males in 2018 was 5.8 times that of white males, while the imprisonment rate of black females was 1.8 times the rate of white females.³ These stark mathematical statistics showing the inequity of our criminal justice system have been repeated over and over to no avail. It has taken the tragic deaths of so many to make these statistics real. This inequality has now become more visible in the interactions between police and African-Americans and other individuals of color throughout the United States. As public defenders, we have seen the devastating consequences of racial injustice for decades. Because of the increasing presence of cell phone video, surveillance cameras, dashboard video and police body cameras this inequality is now present for everyone in our community to see. We must all remember that, more shocking than the images we see, is the fact that these images merely represent a small fraction of what occurs on a daily basis in our community. There are countless interactions between members of our community and the police that are just as offensive and egregious but generate no outcry or protest because a body camera was not turned on or there was no visible proof.

The horrific acts we have all seen has motivated many in our community to demonstrate and protest these long existing injustices. It is their absolute right, and the obligation of us all, to publically participate in this outcry. These protests must be carried out in a peaceful and productive manner and violence and destruction of property have no place in our collective rejection of these injustices. The police and our system of justice have often characterized the actions of those caught killing innocent members of our minority community as the actions of a few renegade officers and not emblematic of the force as a whole. I would ask that the same consideration be given to the many members of our community who are protesting and demonstrating. The actions of a few who engage in property damage or looting is not representative of nor should it detract from the message of the collective call for justice of the great majority of the peaceful protestors.

¹ *Police Behavior during Traffic and Street Stops*, U.S. Department of Justice – Special Report, September 2013, Revised October 2016.

² *Jail Inmates in 2018*, U.S. Department of Justice – Office of Justice Programs, NCJ 253044, March 2020.

³ *Prisoners in 2018*, U.S. Department of Justice – Office of Justice Programs, NCJ 253516, April 2020

It must be acknowledged by everyone that racial bias exists in our criminal justice system and our society as a whole. If law enforcement is truly representative our community, then it is logical to state that they likewise suffer from the same bias and prejudice as our community as a whole. This fact must be acknowledged by law enforcement. In addition to admitting this racial bias exists, we must all demand that law enforcement engages in community building, racial bias training and education focused on the fair and impartial treatment of all our citizens. But most of all, we must demand that our criminal justice system holds those officers who harass, abuse and kill innocent citizens accountable.

Racial injustice is at its core simply injustice: the antithesis of justice. We, the Public Defenders of the Bexar County Public Defender's Office join all the protestors, demonstrators and activists in their demands for justice. We demand justice for George Floyd, Freddy Gray, Walter Scott, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Jr., Ahmaud Arbery, Sandra Bland and the untold others who have been killed because of the racial bias in our nation.



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