Bar Association Statement on George Floyd Death and Protests

Allegheny County Bar Association (PA)

Statement from the President of the Allegheny County Bar Association

The death of George Floyd is another painful reminder of the systemic racism that persists in our society. Sadly, the instances of police brutality against unarmed black men and black women remain vastly disproportionate. It is even more disheartening that the harm being perpetrated by police brutality is at the hands of those who take an oath to serve and protect all individuals equally.

The Allegheny County Bar Association has very purposefully included in our mission that we are to empower our members to promote a just legal system. As attorneys, it is our duty to aggressively promote justice through the rule of law by helping to bring peace and equality to our society. It will take the unified efforts of everyone in our profession, our legislature, and our community to hold law enforcement personnel accountable for these actions and to drive change and reject racism in our society and the criminal justice system.

The ACBA supports the constitutional right to gather for peaceful protest and exercise free speech. We do not condone violence or vandalism as part of any protest; however, the focus on the loss of human life should always rise to the forefront over the concerns of property damage. Consistent with the Value Statement of the ACBA, our leadership will continue to facilitate programs and endeavors seeking to promote equality, diversity and inclusivity in the profession, the justice system and society as a whole.

Lori E. McMaster
President
ACBA

Statement from the Homer S. Brown Division of the ACBA

On Monday, May 25, 2020 George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American man, died after he was handcuffed and pinned to the ground by white Minnesota police officer, Derek Chauvin. With three other officers standing by in silence, Chauvin kneeled on the back and neck of George Floyd for over eight minutes, while Mr. Floyd proclaimed, “I can’t breathe.” His declaration echoed the proverbial sentiment of Black America: Incessant, racially motivated trauma stifles the air of freedom this country professes to provide for all people.

In the past few days, the Nation has seen protests erupt in major cities, including Pittsburgh. Individuals from all walks of life have stood together to march against
police brutality and systemic racism and to demand equality and humane treatment at the hands of law enforcement and by the criminal justice system. While many peaceful protests have been interrupted by property damage, what must not be overshadowed is the message that black lives matter and the irrevocable loss of life is a deep-rooted concern for Black America.

The Homer S. Brown Division of the Allegheny County Bar Association (HSBD) was founded to serve not only Black lawyers and law students, but the Black community at large. We implore our members and the rest of the Pittsburgh community to confront systemic, anti-Black racism as it exists within the community, and more specifically within law enforcement and the criminal justice system. The arc of the moral universe may bend toward justice, but the curve has been set by the blood, sweat, and tears of those who fought for the freedoms we enjoy today. HSBD stands with our community to voice our concerns and continue the fight for equality and justice to ensure that George Floyd and the many who came before him did not lose their lives or voices in vain.

**Statement from the Women in the Law Division of the ACBA**

Last week in Minnesota, George Floyd, a Black man, died under the weight of white Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin who refused to remove his knee from Mr. Floyd’s neck despite multiple pleas from bystanders and Mr. Floyd’s plea that he could not breathe. His killing is a tragic and painful expression of the systemic racism and violence suffered by the Black community throughout this country, as well as right here at home in Pittsburgh.

It is the mission of the Women in the Law Division to confront discrimination against women in the legal profession in all its forms. In our efforts to confront discrimination, we must also stand up against the systems of oppression and discrimination against the Black community. We raise our voices and unite to demand change and justice. As Black women especially continue to be marginalized and face oppression, we are committed to being advocates for change and encourage our entire legal community to stand together and demand that racism, discrimination, and hatred have no place here.

The WLD has always and will always promote diversity and inclusivity for not only the legal profession but our broader community, as well. The WLD calls on our members to take action and work together to make our community a better place, to advocate for change, to speak out against racism in all forms, and to celebrate diversity and inclusion in every aspect of your lives.
In 1973, in her first Supreme Court appearance, then-attorney Ruth Bader Ginsburg concluded her oral argument by quoting abolitionist Sarah Grimké’s words from 1837: “All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks.” That this powerful metaphor of past centuries speaks to the precise method by which a white police officer killed George Floyd, in 2020, highlights all the more the work that remains to be done. The WLD stands with those protesting for equality and justice and is committed to continuing to carry out this work.