



Black Lives Matter: NAPD's Commitment to Transformational Change

June 9, 2020

Yesterday, public defenders from across the country took to the streets and raised their collective voices in support of Black lives and in opposition to police violence, oppression, inequity and state-sponsored terror. To be clear, public defenders are in a unique position to expose police violence and abuse with video and other evidence. We must learn to use our institutional power to expose persistent violence against black and brown communities and demand reform. Perhaps most impressive and telling, no national organization planned these demonstrations. It happened at the grassroots level.

At the same time, as a national organization striving to provide support for and be the voice of public defense in this country, yesterday was also a day of reckoning and self-reflection.

In the days and weeks after the murder of George Floyd, NAPD's leadership did not put out a statement reflecting the pain and outrage of our members and the clients we serve. NAPD did not put out a call to action for radical systemic transformation of our criminal legal system. Instead, as individual leaders, we went about the business of working within our own individual organizations to respond. We at best neglected, and at worst ignored our responsibility to our members. We failed to access the power of collective voice and action, so beautifully on display yesterday. We reduced ourselves to bystanders to this moment in history instead of stepping into it as our members and clients needed and deserved.

From this failure comes more than an apology (and, to our members, we are sorry); NAPD resolves to take a closer look at itself as an organization while simultaneously calling members to action.

So rather than issue another statement, we resolve to channel our shared sense of pain and outrage, along with our collective experience and talent, into doing the hard work of looking in the mirror to transform our organization. NAPD commits itself to reflect anti-racist principles, policies, and practices and lead through a racial and ethnic justice lens. We strive to be an explicitly anti-racist organization, as we build a bold vision for our organization and for the role of public defense in creating a more just and equitable future.

However, as an organization not founded by people of color, and whose membership and leadership does not adequately reflect the predominantly Black and brown people we serve, we will fail if we attempt to move forward alone. The work we do and the commitments we make must be informed by our members, partners, and the communities we serve.

We challenge our member organizations to take the same hard look at themselves while joining us in this transformation.

Over the next few weeks, we are inviting all those who are willing and able to share with us what they want and need from us as an organization, and we will strive to be the change you deserve in the future.

Signed:

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