

June 5, 2020

**STATEMENT TO SEATTLE'S LEADERS IN RESPONSE TO
POLICE BRUTALITY AND SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE**

THE SEATTLE JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
SEATTLE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

An open letter to Seattle's leaders:

The Seattle Journal for Social Justice vehemently opposes the systems of racism that have facilitated over four hundred years of violence against, and oppression of, Black people in America. Our organization stands in solidarity with Black students and the Black community in their demand for justice. We call upon leaders in our community to correct their responses to police brutality and to develop a plan for abolishing these systems of racism from the community. Let us be clear, the infliction of violence upon Black and Brown bodies by militarized police is a crisis.

Over the past week and a half, communities across the globe have come together to express their anger, pain, and fear following the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and so many others. However, the voices that have risen up are being met with hostility. The protests taking place in our streets are being met with police violence. The deafening cries for justice are being met with resistance from leaders in our own community.

The world is calling for justice and our leaders are not listening.

The responses from Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan, Police Chief Carmen Best, and the Seattle University School of Law Administration are inadequate and shockingly late. It is time for our administrators and elected officials to take responsibility and hold themselves accountable for their contributions to the systems of racism that plague the city of Seattle and repeatedly injure Black communities. Our community is tired of hearing elected officials use the phrase "Black Lives Matter" only in the wake of nationwide tragedies. It is time for our leaders to either engage in institutional reform, protecting and affirming Black lives and the Black community, or remove themselves from their position of power to make way for someone who will.

To Mayor Jenny Durkan,

The message that you sent by imposing a 5:00 pm curfew on the city has been heard loud and clear--you do not stand with the protestors and you do not stand with the Black community. The only purpose for imposing such a restriction was to stifle the voices that are calling for justice and demanding change. When your curfew failed to shut down Seattle's protests, you allowed the Seattle

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Police Department to terrorize the community by deploying military grade weaponry and tactics against Black citizens and anyone standing with them.

Additionally, our organization is dumbstruck by your demonstrated concern for property damage over your concern for Black lives. Your passionate condemnation of property damage reveals your priorities, especially now, when you should be focused on leading Seattle toward meaningful and lasting justice for the Black community. Property can be replaced. Black lives cannot.

We call upon you to issue a public apology for standing on the wrong side of justice and to take corrective action immediately.

We demand that the Seattle Police Department be demilitarized and defunded and that those funds be reallocated to institutions offering support in Black communities. We encourage you to publicly respond to and adopt all of Black Lives Matter Seattle and COVID19 Mutual Aid Seattle's [demands](#). This means Seattle must divest from its institutions that perpetuate racialized violence and invest in medical care, mental health treatment, housing, educational opportunities, wealth redistribution, and voting equality for the Black members of our community.

To the Deans of Seattle University School of Law,

“Seattle University School of Law boasts the Pacific Northwest's most diverse student body.”

These words are featured prominently on our admissions page, yet our Black students did not hear a single word from the law school administration until June 2, 2020--eight days after George Floyd's death, eighty-three days after Breonna Taylor's death, and 102 days after Ahmaud Arbery's death. Our law school administration responded only after the Black Law Student Association widely disseminated a moving statement of solidarity. The administration remained silent for several days while students and members of the community took to the streets to protest these atrocities, facing pepper spray, tear gas, rubber bullets, and other applications of physical force and psychological intimidation by the Seattle Police Department and the National Guard.

The administration has failed to address its own wrongdoings and shortfalls when it comes to supporting Black students and the Black community. Issues of institutional and systemic racism are in the spotlight of our country's collective conscience and cannot be ignored.

While it is clear that Dean Clark's response was well intended, it demonstrated a shocking lack of insight, understanding, and self reflection. The Black Law Student Association and Black students should not have to carry the burden of being at the forefront of these actions to explain why these racist acts need to be swiftly and unequivocally condemned. Black communities are mentally,

physically, and emotionally exhausted. They must not be expected to carry the burden of challenging racism wherever and whenever it arises. As the administrators of our law school, you are tasked with ensuring the safety and success of our law school community. We need you to become who your community needs you to be.

Dean Clark acknowledged that “to stay silent is to be complicit.” Why is the administration remaining silent when there is so much to be said? It is not enough to send an email regarding the pain that *you* personally have experienced in the wake of these violent acts. It is not enough to talk about racial injustice and systemic inequality in the abstract. It is not enough to prop yourself up on the emotional labor of Dr. Natasha Martin or Professor Bryan Adamson. It is not enough to say that you see and hear Black students if those students consistently have not felt seen or heard. It is not enough to apologize if you fail to address our law school’s role in perpetuating oppression and racial inequity, both within our own programs and in the broader legal profession.

The platitudes offered by the school of law are simply not enough. Your response to Black law students falls somewhere between well-intentioned ignorance and ineffectual leadership. The administration must do more and reforms must be implemented. We need more than an hour long lecture on race. We need more than an annual book discussion. We need more than promises to make plans in the future.

We demand immediate action. It is imperative that the administration listens to its Black colleagues at this time; Black professors, faculty members, and students must be compensated for their emotional labor when they engage in the incredibly draining work of educating students, staff, and administrators. The administration must increase the scope and availability of resources for Black students. The administration must establish convenient and unrestricted race-informed mental health services to combat the immense amount of stress and grief that Black students experience. At this time, we encourage the university to suspend the practice of making the renewal of student scholarships contingent upon GPA; it is unfair to place such financial and academic strain on students, especially Black students and students of color, who are already forced to endure systemic inequality and racism within our own institution. Further, we ask that the administration strongly advocate for diploma privileges. Doing so will alleviate unnecessary stress, particularly for Black graduates, so they are not unfairly expected to study for the bar exam (which has roots in excluding people of color from the practice of law) in the midst of both a global pandemic and a grueling historical revolution.

It is imperative that the law school administration be transparent regarding the budgets for student organizations and journals. End the practice of providing increased funding to organizations predominated by White students over those with predominantly Black students. The administration needs to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline and the inaccessibility of higher education for Black students. The administration must implement a policy to

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address microaggressions in the classroom and in the law school community. The administration must recruit and admit significantly more Black law students; it must also institute structural changes that effectively support those Black students once they become members of the SU law community. It is time for the administration to stop showcasing statistics and images of diversity for the sake of publicity without adequately providing financial, academic, and emotional support for its Black community. Reparations matter, and anything less amounts to institutional violence.

We challenge the university to open its pocketbook. We challenge the university to invest in and hire Black professors and administrators. We challenge the university to publicly support the demilitarization and defunding of the Seattle Police Department. This starts by severing the ties between the university and the police department. We challenge the university administration to put their bodies on the line, if they are able, and protest beside its Black students and allies. We challenge the university to check in on its Black students and Black alumnus. Finally, we challenge the university to engage in deeper institutional reflection and meaningful dialogues that promote racial justice rather than remaining complicit in the status quo.

To our community,

The Seattle Journal for Social Justice urges you to continue pushing for justice and for change. Our members vow to be there beside you, fighting for racial equity and the breakdown of racist institutions. Protest. Amplify Black voices. Educate yourselves in anti-racist advocacy (see [addendum](#) for resources). Educate your colleagues. Have difficult conversations with your family members and your peers. Call out racism. Call out [microaggressions](#). Support [Black-owned businesses](#). Donate to organizations combating racism. [Vote](#) in every election--especially the local ones. [Contact](#) your representatives. Take an active role in issuing [reparations](#). Engage with our juridical history using a [critical race theoretic framework](#). Reach out to your Black colleagues and friends in the Black community and offer your support. And do not stop. This movement will not end when the protests do. This movement will not end when a handful of officers are charged and a few states have passed laws in an effort to combat police racism. To achieve and maintain a just society, we must forever remain steadfast in our dedication to equity and work toward justice every day. Without pause. Without praise.

In solidarity,

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Link to addendum with additional resources:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kI7e1D9khZL9p7KXW5ahySM8vau0l7qgqiDQvw_kVqo/e/dit