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**JOINT LETTER FROM THE
CLARK COUNTY PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S ACTION AND REFORM COMMITTEE AND CLARK
COUNTY PROSECUTOR TONY GOLIK**

July 7, 2020

Systemic racism exists in Clark County, in Washington State, and throughout the entire United States. To deny it is to perpetuate it. Systemic racism has its roots in our history, our laws, and our culture. But it is not always overt and obvious. It is hidden in the structures of our society. Even when its operation is invisible, its devastating, generational impacts can be seen throughout our community.

We know systemic racism exists because those who experience it and suffer from it are telling us it does. That should be enough, but, if it is not, empirical evidence also tells us that systemic racism exists. Recent studies looking at our community have identified racial disparities in public schools' discipline and hiring practices, in higher-education outcomes, and in access to healthcare.

Acknowledging a problem is the first necessary step in meaningfully addressing it. The long overdue open dialogue that has begun in our county is encouraging and we commend Clark County Sheriff Atkins and Vancouver Police Chief McElvain on taking a first step towards validating the community's concerns and moving towards productive discussion by removing the "thin blue line" and "blue lives matter" iconography from county and city property. Our law enforcement community is listening and learning, and we commend that process and progress.

We recognize that while the removal of these symbols was a meaningful gesture, it was not an easy one. Symbols have deep meaning, but their meaning is not always universal. Symbolism and imagery often morph over time, and our choices to use them or not must occur in the context of what they mean at this point in time. When a symbol represents separation and division to a marginalized group in our community, it is important that we listen and reflect on what message that symbol sends. It is imperative that we work through the pain and discomfort the resulting dialogue may bring in an effort to right the wrongs that have persisted in this country since before its inception.

When we hear difficult truths about our community, we must reject the instinct to be defensive. We must reject the desire to put ourselves in the right and we absolutely must reject the temptation to turn a blind eye and say that racial inequity and systemic racism are only problems in other communities. We need to put aside those instincts to truly be able to hear what marginalized voices are saying.

The Clark County Prosecuting Attorney's Office acknowledges that systemic racism exists in the criminal justice system, of which we are a part. We are dedicated to intentionally and actively identifying and eliminating racial inequities in our office, our courts, and our community here in Clark County. It is time to change. What we have been doing as a society simply is not working. We in the Prosecuting Attorney's Office have the power to evaluate policies, laws, and practices to change those that have contributed to institutional racism. We make the commitment to the community to actively educate ourselves and listen to the members of our community who have been impacted by systemic injustice. We commit to pursuing anti-racist policies to truly ensure equal justice under the law.

DRW
Deborah Wechselblatt,
Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney & Chairperson
CCPA Action and Reform Committee


Tony Golik
Clark County Prosecuting Attorney