



June 16, 2020

Joint Statement by the AWAAG Organizing Committee and the Solidarity Caucus of the Professional Staff Organizing Committee

The organizing committee of the Association of Washington Assistant Attorneys General (AWAAG) and the Solidarity Caucus of the Professional Staff organizing committee of the same office condemn racism and commit to the work of effectuating change. The killing of George Floyd is yet another in a 400-year history of Black lives stolen. This has brought structural racism, white supremacist violence, and injustice towards persons of color -- particularly Black men, women, and youth -- to the forefront of our nation's discourse. The very foundation of our country was corrupted by slavery and the devaluation, exploitation, and disenfranchisement of Black, Brown, and indigenous people. Racism is deeply ingrained within our society, including and especially in the legal system. As aptly stated by the Washington Supreme Court, the “systemic oppression of black Americans is not merely incorrect and harmful; it is shameful and deadly.” Recognizing our own state and Office’s role in these systems, it is our moral obligation as the lawyers and staff of the Attorney General’s Office --Washington’s largest public law office -- to commit to the work of eliminating systemic racism in our society and profession.

As newly formed unions, it must be a priority above all others that we devote our collective power towards achieving equity in enforcing the rights of all of our members. Towards that end, our unions commit to demanding further implementation of processes that increase the diversity of our membership, establish equity in our compensation and benefits, and promote more members of color into management and leadership positions.

We call on our members to continuously educate themselves on issues of racism in this country and to take action. Whether it is engaging in conversations or marching in protest, we all have a role. As legal professionals, we have a unique set of skills and voices that we must use to amplify the cause of anti-racism. If you are looking for action steps you can take, here are a few suggestions from our organizing committee:

- Write, in your individual capacity, to your local, state, and national legislators.
- Vote, and encourage the people you know who abstain from participating in our election process to register to vote now.
- Discuss racism with your friends, family members and children.
- Support Black, Indigenous, and People of Color led organizations working to achieve racial equity.
- Read, watch, and listen to books, documentaries, and podcasts that address racism. The following are just a few suggestions:
 - The New Jim Crow, by Michelle Alexander
 - Just Mercy, a 2019 film based on Bryan Stevenson's autobiography (available to stream free until June 29 at: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/p/just-mercy/8d6kgwxn0pzw?activetab=pivot:overviewtab>)
 - 13th, a 2016 documentary directed by Ava DuVernay on Netflix
 - How to be Anti Racist, by Ibram X. Kendi
 - The House I Live In, a 2012 documentary
 - The Case for Reparations, by Ta-Nehisi Coates
 - White Fragility, by Robin DiAngelo
 - A People's History of the United States, by Howard Zinn
 - Unlocking Us with Brene Brown: Brene with Ibram Kendi on How to be an Anti Racist, a podcast episode released June 2, 2020

The mission of the Washington State Attorney General's Office is to be the best public law office in the nation. That mission can only be realized by us, the rank and file attorneys and professional staff that serve the people of Washington. Our nation and this State can and must eliminate racism. We pledge to be part of the process.

Finally, as unions of professionals in the law, we implore our sibling unions in law enforcement to reject the perpetuation of racism and oppression against communities of color by holding your members accountable and affirming that Black Lives Matter.