



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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We Stand for Racial Justice

A Joint Statement from NLADA and the Shriver Center

Members of the legal aid and public defender community were horrified and outraged by the killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. Two more Black lives taken by those who ostensibly serve and protect. We must find a better path toward justice for our society and for people of color. A first step for our community is to state firmly that we stand in solidarity with the Black community and against the racial inequality that still plagues our nation.

We affirm what should be undeniable—Black Lives Matter. The recurring violence against Black people is but an extreme manifestation of our society's persistent racism, which denies the Black community, and other communities of color, the right and opportunity to be safe and healthy, to work and live with dignity, and to flourish.

We live in a country where those tasked with protecting our communities too often possess unfounded biases, whether implicit or explicit, that Black people pose a constant danger. This has led to situations where having a broken taillight or selling cigarettes or CDs is punishable by death; where reaching for a wallet is an act of aggression warranting a lethal response.

Our country has always been plagued by these beliefs—that Black communities and other communities of color are criminal and untrustworthy. This is not limited to one part of the country; it is a systemic national problem stretching from New York to Minnesota, California to Florida, and beyond. Our solutions must also be national and systemic. We must address the significant role that race plays in policing practices. Members of the legal aid and public defender community must form genuine and sustainable, community-led partnerships aimed at bridging the racial divide in our country.

Honoring this commitment will take hard work and honest self-criticism. "We've always done it this way" is not enough. We commit to a hard look at our work and to ensuring our efforts are driven by the experiences of people of color and an explicit commitment to combating racism. We commit to a hard look at ourselves and our organizations to consciously challenge our own biases and ways we unintentionally contribute to systems of racial disadvantage. We commit to building enduring alliances with communities who struggle against racism every day. Our work must support community leadership.

As we honor the pain and suffering of the communities that have lost loved ones, including the five officers killed in Dallas, we must be guided by justice and love. For us, that path starts with a commitment to be steadfast allies in the pursuit of racial justice. We must work together with all stakeholders, including law enforcement, to develop solutions to these very pressing problems.

As an immediate next step, we will work with our partners to develop an Action Plan for Racial Justice that can guide our organizations in effectuating our commitment.

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The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law provides national leadership in advancing laws and policies that secure justice to improve the lives and opportunities of people living in poverty. We specialize in practical solutions. We advocate for and serve clients directly, while also building the capacity of the nation's legal aid providers to advance justice and opportunity for their clients. www.povertylaw.org

The National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA), founded in 1911, based in Washington, DC, is America's oldest and largest nonprofit association devoted to excellence in the delivery of legal services to those who cannot afford counsel. NLADA has pioneered access to justice at the national, state, and local levels, and works to establish and strengthen the nation's public defense systems. A leader in the development of national standards for legal aid and indigent defense, NLADA also provides advocacy, training, and technical assistance to equal justice advocates across the country. www.nlada.org