



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF LAW

In the past couple of weeks I have watched with horror as Ahmaud Arbery was chased and killed for something I've done many times—walk into a house under construction to view the layout and progress toward completion. Days later, George Floyd was murdered in the most despicable act of domination I have ever witnessed, by a police officer suffocating Floyd with his knee to Floyd's neck and his hands in his pockets like he was out on a Sunday stroll. These heinous acts have sparked outrage and protest across the world, and they have created energy to shine a light on other police killings of Black community members, including but sadly not limited to Breonna Taylor in Louisville, as well as Tony McDade, Mychael Johnson, and Wilbon C. Woodard here in Tallahassee.

These events have caused pain, frustration and anger for so many of us, and they represent an assault on humanity. These events rightly motivate us to find a way to use our legal skills to advocate for change. We must work to prevent the killing of unarmed citizens, and we must fight to preserve the rule of law. Justice, equality, and legality are the goals of the legal profession, and we all owe an obligation to do our very best to promote these values.

At the same time, these killings all involve Black victims, and they symbolically represent the killing of countless other Black members of our communities by the state or in state-sanctioned environments. The oppression and brutality against our Black community members has a centuries-long history, and it causes deep pain, fatigue, and a sense of hopelessness among many of our Black colleagues, friends, and neighbors. They need us to make a commitment to stand with them and to help carry the torch of justice, equality, and legality for them while they mourn and support one another. This need was beautifully, powerfully, and professionally expressed by the leadership of our Black Law Students Association in a statement provided earlier this week. That said, we need to empower our Black colleagues to lead us, when they are ready, toward positive change in our communities and elsewhere.

We've begun this journey at the College of Law. Many student organizations have pledged to be allies in the fight for justice. A Community Zoom meeting provided a space for Black students to express their pain, their hope, and the advancements in diversity, inclusion, and equity they would like to see at the law school. It also enabled those of us newly awakened to this injustice to better understand how we can both support and assist. And we hope to have opened a dialogue

about how we heal and move forward both here and elsewhere. Next week we will host a Zoom panel discussion on the role of police training, police policies, and legal reforms in the prevention of police brutality. We are crafting future programming designed to support our students of color and provide additional education and conversations around these crucially important issues.

I could not be prouder of our students, faculty and administrative team for making a commitment to support our Black students and to work to promote desperately-needed change. The conversation is difficult, and the changes proposed are not easy. But I am confident that the FSU Law community is poised to bring about positive change both locally and nationally. In this process, we challenge our alums to make a commitment to do the same, in the form that matches your passions rather than your comfort levels. Please join us in finding a way to support our Black students, alumni, staff, faculty and colleagues, and please make a commitment toward the prevention of oppression and injustice toward our Black neighbors, as well as the advancement of diversity, inclusion, and equity in your local communities.

-Dean Erin O'Connor