



Dear Brandeis Students, Staff and Faculty:

On Friday, May 29, President Neeli Bendapudi sent a message to the campus community about the recent, tragic losses of African American lives both here in Louisville and elsewhere in the country. In her message, she stressed our Cardinal Principle commitments to diversity and inclusion, commitments that are given real meaning in light of recent local and national events.

One of those losses, as we know all too well by now, occurred here in Louisville. For my part, I cannot get out of my mind the idea that Breonna Taylor, the young woman killed at home by police who entered with a no-knock warrant, was the age of most of our law students. That fact brings home to me the reality of a life full of hope and promise that was lost too soon – tragically and violently.

Since President Bendapudi sent her message, moreover, we have seen days and nights across the country of protests, invoking the names not just of Breonna Taylor, but of others elsewhere, of George Floyd, of Ahmaud Arbery. Some of these protests, as you all know, have turned violent and involved destruction of property and physical harm. Last night, another life was lost here in Louisville, apparently as a consequence of the protests. [\[Subsequent to sending this statement, we learned that the life lost was that of David McAtee, a beloved African-American restaurant owner in West Louisville.\]](#)

As I watch these events unfold, I think of the importance of the law at times like these. Law is everywhere at this moment. Lawyers likely approved the no-knock warrant policy that has now been rescinded. Lawyers originally charged Breonna Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, for the shot he fired from his own, permitted firearm. A lawyer – the Commonwealth Attorney – subsequently rescinded those charges. Lawyers will represent Taylor's family and Walker going ahead, as they will do for the police involved.

The law also permits us as Americans to protest peacefully. And the law will be used to punish those who turned peaceable protests violent, unnecessarily and with needless destruction of property, causing physical injury and further death.

Perhaps most powerfully, these events remind me of our national commitment to equality of treatment before the law, a principle included in the 14th Amendment over a century ago. The inequities that led to its passage, as recent events demonstrate, are tragically still with us. For my part, I therefore hope that this historical moment will lead all of us to re-examine the persistent disparities and inequities that too often characterize the structure and practice of

our institutions, enabling systematic oppression of particular groups, and especially of African Americans. I hope that many of you feel the same. The current events show us that we still have far to go to be able truly to claim to be “one nation, undivided, with liberty and justice for all.”

Lawyers can help change that reality. Lawyers will be evermore important in the coming months and years. More will be demanded of us as we are called upon to dedicate ourselves, as officers of the court and as those who translate our highest principles into laws and regulations, to the cause of justice applied equally and fairly for all people, no matter what they look like or their station in life. As Justice Brandeis famously said, “The greatest menace to freedom is an inert people.” This is no time for us as a people – and as lawyers – to be inert.

In the months to come, I look forward to joining many of you in a project to address the inequities that current events continue to lay bare, to think about and develop strategies that we, as lawyers, can help articulate and implement so as to make our society fairer and more just. At a challenging time for our city and our country, let me close by saying I hope you are staying safe and sound. I look forward to connecting virtually, and when circumstances permit, in person in the months to come.

Sincerely,

Colin

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