

April 22, 2021

Dear Members of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Community,

Earlier this week, a Minnesota jury entered the globally viewed courtroom in the trial of Derek Chauvin in Hennepin County Government Center in downtown Minneapolis. Their decision came as our nation and, indeed the world, observed withholding its breath. The anxiety, fear, and reluctant hope palpable across the country. Preparations were made for guilty as well as not guilty verdicts as local police and the National Guard were mobilized, local businesses were boarded up, the city placed on high alert, and protesters rallied on the sidewalks. The murder of George Floyd on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 was witnessed by millions leading to protests and the traumatization of our nation. The path to indictment and trial brought with it repeated retraumatization, as did the graphic video shared during the trial. Mr. Floyd's death sparked the reawakening of a movement in which people of all races and backgrounds took to the streets in droves, calling out for the righting of this horrific wrong. That culpability was manifested on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with the verdict, guilty on all counts. There was a collective sigh across the nation as Mr. Chauvin was held accountable, the tension and fear of what would come following a different outcome, gone.

Spanning centuries from enslavement to segregation to the seemingly daily castigation for being Black, relief, not celebration, however brief, is an emotion seldom experienced by African Americans. There was a moment of being able to breathe, unlike George Floyd, Eric Garner, Eric Courtney Harris, Derrick Scott, Manual Ellis, Christopher Lowe, Byron Williams, and at least 70 others known to have died in police custody. That moment of relief is one so precious that it may cause us to think the work is done and all will be well. Sadly, this is not the case. Just this past week, we witnessed the excruciatingly painful and deadly shootings by police of 16-year old Black female, Ma'Khia Bryant; 13 year old Latinx boy, Adam Toledo; and 20 year old Daunte Wright, a Black male, during a routine traffic stop among many others. We mourn their deaths and send our sympathies to their families. We concur that this must "Stop right now!"

The fleeting moment of relief after Mr. Chauvin was held accountable is a call for us to intensify our efforts toward social justice for all members of our community. This inflection point in our history provides the opportunity for African descended individuals and other BIPOC individuals and all allies to dare to hope, to continue to press on for equity and for change. We stand with the Floyd family in their continued fight against injustice and applaud their bravery, persistence, and consistent message of unity. The verdict offered accountability for one, but it did not atone for Mr. Floyd's death or the countless other African descended individuals who have lost their lives to police violence at the hands of police officers without any chance of justice. The guilty verdict will not bring back George Floyd or any Black children or loved ones or victims of violence and thus brings no peace.

The witnessing, experiencing, and being exposed to the continued and far too frequent injustices exacted against African descended and other people of color may leave you

feeling exhausted, angry, depressed, anxious, or other intense emotions. We encourage you to utilize family, community, and faith resources, including those within our department and the broader Emory community to provide you support. We also encourage everyone to work toward systemic change, which will require police reform bills and a restructuring of our justice system. We have to engage actively in systems of prevention and restoration.

Together, we must strive toward a future in which everyone can live in peace and safety. We have miles to walk before we sleep and encourage all of our members to speak up, stand against, and take action against racism, hatred, and bigotry. We have a responsibility to do our part in building a system that recognizes everyone's value and dignity. Social justice, equity, and inclusion resides in all of us. Together we can and will do the work that needs to be done for a better world, a better future and a better humankind. If this verdict is to be a turning point it means that each of us and millions of other people in our country will continue to take action in the service of meaningful structural and systemic change.

With hope and commitment to change,  
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**DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**  
SUBCOMMITTEE