

**Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity
in the Criminal Justice System**

Statement on Recent Events involving
Police and People of Marginalized Racial Groups

*Hon. Lubbie Harper, Jr.
Chair*

The *State of Connecticut Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System (CREDCJS)* has the important responsibility to bring together justice-related state agencies and decision-makers to identify, and seek to eliminate, racial and ethnic disparity in our state's criminal justice system. The CREDCJS would be remiss to fail to discuss and share thoughts about the recent public tragedies of police brutality on Americans of African descent, and the many lives that have been, and continue to be, tragically lost.

We are appalled, sickened, and exhausted by the carelessness and lack of consideration for the lives of people of marginalized racial groups. We deeply condemn the racism targeted toward our fellow Americans, both systemic and blatant, especially in our justice system. We are more motivated than ever to fight for, and bring actual justice, to our criminal justice system.

Recent public tragic events have brought racism and police brutality toward our fellow Americans of African descent to the limelight, however, these behaviors are not new. Our nation cannot move forward, or truly make amends with its Americans of African descent, unless we recognize that racism still exists today and that there is disparate treatment and consideration given to people of marginalized racial groups in both society, and our justice system.

Since abolishing slavery, the United States has shifted from servitude to control-through-terror, oftentimes using the police as the enforcer, or silent endorser, through intentional neglect in seeking justice for Americans of African descent. The criminal justice system was used to control, threaten, and stifle people of marginalized racial groups into eternal third-class status, while convincing its white Americans that this enforcement was necessary and just to ensure public safety.

We need to accept and address that Americans of African descent do not feel safe in their own country, community, or neighborhoods, simply because of the color of their skin. The ongoing mistreatment and disregard for the lives of people of

marginalized racial groups has fueled distrust, disappointment, and, unfortunately, even death at the hands of those who we charge with keeping us safe - law enforcement.

We, and all Americans, must act immediately to acknowledge and accept that this nation was built on a foundation of racism, doing so is the first step toward working together to repair the systems that further fuel disparities and injustices in our country. We need to openly and honestly discuss the fact that racism is still present today, even if it may make some uncomfortable. We must help our fellow Americans, who do not believe that racism is prevalent and powerful today, understand its existence and how it is crippling our nation at its core. We must prove to Americans of African descent that we care, that we hear their cries of injustice, that we want to make it right, and that we will fight alongside them to do so.

Since its inception in 2000, the CREDCJS has worked to help improve our state's criminal justice system in a variety of ways. The Commission and its esteemed members recognize the significant impact implicit biases play in judicial decision-making, and throughout the criminal justice process in general. They have fought for years to have jury instruction language on the existence of implicit biases, and their influences on juror decision-making, adopted in the State of Connecticut. The Commission was pleased to see the results of their efforts when the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch adopted implicit bias jury instruction language in 2019.

The Commission has held several trainings and conferences, specifically on implicit biases, for professionals from all areas of the Connecticut criminal justice system in an effort to mitigate the influence of biases in our judicial practices. The CREDCJS partnered with the CT Judicial Branch, the Division of Public Defender Services, the Division of Criminal Justice, and the Criminal Justice Commission to facilitate the first-ever joint training for both public defenders and prosecutors about the impact implicit biases have on those involved with the criminal justice system. The CREDCJS also organized and hosted a daylong symposium in July 2019 to address implicit bias and how these biases – which we *all* have – might affect our behavior. Attendees also discussed strategies and practices to help mitigate a disparate impact on people of marginalized racial groups in Connecticut. As of recently, and following a competitive bidding process, Connecticut was the *only state* to be awarded a MacArthur “Safety and Justice Challenge” grant, with one aspect of that work to include the CREDCJS’ development and execution of a training-of-trainers program on implicit bias. This encouraged justice leaders to understand and accept the existence of biases, and the influence these biases have in our justice systems. Members of state and local law enforcement, public defenders, prosecutors, and

other community leaders attended this training. By increasing awareness of the existence of implicit biases in all persons, the CREDCJS has been able to improve the neutrality of decision-making in our criminal justice system, and we will continue to do so until full neutrality is achieved.

We would appreciate your support and ideas for continuing our important work to fulfill our mission. The Commission would greatly appreciate any and all support to help ensure that this important work we are doing can continue, until we can unanimously reach a common goal to ensure the safety of all our Connecticut citizens.