

UNIVERSITY OF
LOUISVILLE

December 20, 2016

Dear President Pinto and Provost Billingsley:

We as directors of two campus institutes explicitly dedicated to social justice recently initiated a faculty and staff support statement regarding the Black Lives Matter movement, to which about 171 university employees signed on. The statement and those signatures are attached.

As a university with a metropolitan mission to serve the greater Louisville community, home to the largest concentration of African Americans in the state, the University of Louisville--we believe--bears great responsibility to make our campus and our wider community as safe and as free of threat as possible to our students, staff, and faculty of color, who are and have throughout U.S. history been subject to disproportionate levels of violence at the hands of those authorized to protect them. The Kent School banner supporting the Black Lives Matter movement acts as a beacon of hope and safety to students, faculty, and staff of color, and we encourage you to support this action from our Social Work faculty, staff, and students. We hope you will continue to take positive steps in this regard.

Sincerely,



Cate Fosl
Director,
Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research
Professor, Women's and Gender Studies



Enid Trucios-Haynes
Interim Director,
Muhammad Ali Institute for Peace and
Justice
Professor of Law
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Program

December 20, 2016

We as members of the UofL community support the Black Lives Matter movement and principles, and we endorse the Kent School of Social Work's powerful position statement about the role of educators.

Kent School of Social Work Position Statement on Black Lives Matter, Recent Police Shootings and Violence

Social work is a profession committed to promoting social justice and social change in pursuit of enhanced well-being for all members of society. Everyone deserves the opportunity to pursue their potential free from the threat of violence. The Kent School of Social Work must take a stand regarding the abhorrent violence erupting across our country. We cannot ignore the deaths of unarmed African American men across the country, parishioners attending bible study in Charleston, members of the LGBTQ community in Orlando, and police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge. As a society we must stand together to stop incidents fueled by racial hatred and oppression. Americans are better than this.

Yes, Black Lives Matter. This doesn't mean that other lives do not matter. It means we must address the reality that we have a tremendously disturbing trend in the deaths of people of color that must be stopped. It doesn't help to deny that oppression is real in this country and imply that by suggesting it has played a role in Ferguson, Philadelphia, Charleston, Orlando, Baton Rouge, St. Paul and Dallas is fanning the fires of racism. It isn't enough to denounce these events, although we do. We must take proactive steps to stop racial profiling and the shooting of unarmed black men by a subset of our nation's law enforcement officers. Research has shown that the probability of black, unarmed Americans being shot by police is up to 3.49 times higher than that of unarmed white Americans (Ross, 2015 [1]; Nix, et al, 2016), while Blacks and Latinos are more than fifty percent more likely to experience some form of force in interaction with police (Fryer, 2016).

Americans appreciate the thousands of brave law enforcement officers doing their best to promote public safety. By acknowledging there is a problem with some does not denigrate the integrity of many. Civil discourse does not promote violence against law enforcement officers. Fatal shootings of law enforcement officers increased this year with the officers killed in Dallas and Baton Rouge, but the data also show a longer-term trend of declining percentages of officers killed.

We cannot allow our response to be more violence or finger pointing. As former President George W. Bush said at the funeral for Dallas police officers, "Too often, we judge other groups by their worst examples, while judging ourselves by our best intentions...To renew our unity, we only have to remember our values...At our best we practice empathy. This is the bridge across

our nation's biggest divisions." The first step toward unity starts here at the Kent School. President Obama said, "I see what's possible when we recognize that we are one American family, all deserving of equal treatment. All deserving equal respect." The Kent School will facilitate the dialogue necessary to process these issues, heal the wounds we all experience through exposure to this violence, and begin to establish the common ground and a return to the higher purpose we are capable of at this university and in America.

We must also pursue social change to address what underlies oppression-driven violence. President Obama reminds us: "As a society, we choose to under-invest in decent schools. We allow poverty to fester so that entire neighborhoods offer no prospect for gainful employment. We refuse to fund drug treatment and mental health programs. We flood communities with so many guns that it is easier for a teenager to buy a Glock than get his hands on a computer or even a book... And if we cannot even talk about these things... with those who look different than us or bring a different perspective, then we will never break this dangerous cycle... Can we see in each other a common humanity and a shared dignity, and recognize how our different experiences have shaped us?" The Kent School of Social Work will work to promote empathy, compassionate, and respectful engagement in our community to address these issues that threaten the very ideals upon which our society was built. We call upon our colleagues and students elsewhere at the University to stand and join with us.

The Kent School will also be launching a social media campaign to offer suggestions for how our colleagues and friends can show solidarity. We understand that it is sometimes difficult to know where to start when faced with a social justice issue of this magnitude, so we hope that by providing some ideas on how to get involved, we can make it easier for all of us to come together to take a stand against this violence that is plaguing our country. Beginning today, visit us at www.facebook.com/KentSchoolOfSocialWork, www.twitter.com/KentSSW, and www.instagram.com/kent_school to learn more.

[1] References available on request.

<http://louisville.edu/kent/news/kent-school-of-social-work-position-statement-on-black-lives-matter-recent-police-shootings-and-violence>

University of Louisville faculty and staff signatures of support:

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Emily Blair
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Kristen Brown
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