Once again, we have witnessed the death of an unarmed Black man at the hands of a white police officer. And again, the nation has come together to protest that death, demand accountability, and call for an end to the entrenched institutional racism in our country. The Western Association of Criminal Justice hears that call and is committed to those goals.

Any time a person dies in police custody, it is a stark reminder that those who educate the next generation of police leadership must do better. But the killing of George Floyd, as well as the recent deaths of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, remind us that all too often these tragic incidents are borne by Black Americans and minorities.

As educators, we must engage in conversation with our students about racism, its generational effects, and how to challenge anti-Black and anti-minority narratives. This also means listening to the voices of those calling for change and hearing uncomfortable truths about the many ways racism affects the people of our community.

The systemic racism in our criminal justice system must be condemned. But that is not enough. We also must act. That is why the next annual WACJ conference in October 2021 will be focused on the theme of “Race and Criminal Justice.” We call on our members to actively research in this area, not only to present findings at WACJ 2021, but use those findings to engage with the community and with law enforcement professionals.

We join with the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences in calling for large-scale policy reforms, informed by rigorous empirical research. As academics in this field, our members can be instrumental in researching policies and practices to eradicate inequality in policing and law, and in developing teaching methods and tools to improve law enforcement and community relations.

We are fortunate to be in a position to effect change within our communities and it is imperative we live up to that responsibility, now and in the future.

– The Board of the Western Association of Criminal Justice