



New York State Defenders Association, Inc.

Public Defense Backup Center

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Black Lives Matter to the New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA)

NYSDA shares the worldwide anger and mourning flowing from the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis. We condemn this recent and blatant instance in a devastatingly long line of police murders and brutality against Black people in this state and nation. The list includes men, women, and children, stretching back decades, and centuries, people such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tamir Rice.

NYSDA honors those taking action—in the streets, in the courts, in the media, and in daily conversation—to end the racial oppression manifested in Mr. Floyd's death.

We stand with public defenders across New York and the nation who took collective action on June 8, 2020, sharing the message that Black Lives Matter to Public Defenders. We support public defenders who take steps to reveal, deal with, and heal the trauma inflicted upon people who experience racism every day. Every day, public defenders do so through their representation and advocacy for clients in the criminal and family courts, as well as in legislatures and executive offices at the federal, state, and local levels.

NYSDA calls for an end to brutal law enforcement practices on the streets and in jails and prisons. While we have seen efforts over the years to reform the police and police practices, these reforms are nowhere near sufficient, as they have not stopped the violence against Black people and the over-supervision of Black communities. We are listening to and learning from the advocates and scholars who have worked for years on reimagining and transforming society from the current carceral state to one that is safer and healthier for all.

We call on prosecutors to take action as well. District attorneys work with the police on a daily basis and are aware of illegal and unconstitutional actions by police departments and individual officers, but have too often protected them. Prosecutors must expose and condemn such actions. They must re-examine their relationship with police departments and acknowledge and accept responsibility for their role in the mass incarceration of Black men, women, and children.

Systemic racism and implicit biases are embedded in every aspect of our society, including the child welfare system. We stand with public defenders and parent advocates who fight every day in family court to make both structural and case-specific changes to keep families together rather than tear them apart.

NYSDA Actions

NYSDA will continue our efforts—through our publications, training, support services for public defenders, and advocacy—to expose and end the overt racism and implicit biases that traumatize and re-traumatize entire communities.

In our work as a resource center for public defenders, we will enhance our training on systemic racism and implicit bias in the criminal legal and child welfare systems and make relevant materials and resources readily accessible on our website.

We promise to improve our efforts to recruit and provide opportunities for Black public defenders and other experts to present at NYSDA training programs.

Throughout our work, we pledge to seek the guidance of those directly impacted by continuing racism and police violence in their communities. We cannot do this alone and we will reach out to and partner with our allies.