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LawNY's Statement On Racial Justice and Our Commitment to Do Better:

George Floyd. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery. Michael Brown. Eric Garner. Philando Castile. Trayvon Martin. We say their names. We honor their lives, lives that mattered to their family, friends, and communities. Lives that matter. We are devastated by the loss of another member of the Black community, and we join the voices of people all across our country and across the world saying this must stop. The killing of Black people through the deadly use of force must stop.

We are at this moment because of our country's history of systemic and structural racism, white supremacy, and oppression of Black people and people of color. This systemic racism started with slavery but has consistently evolved into other forms of oppression that continue to exist today. This has an impact on both our civil and criminal justice systems, as well as in most other institutions in our country. The words "equal justice under law" and "justice for all" are still ideals that we are far from realizing.

As lawyers and advocates, we have witnessed discrimination, unfair treatment, and policies designed to enforce inequality across all sectors. Structural racism and discrimination in housing, education, employment and health, when combined with the effects of over-policing and mass incarceration, have had devastating consequences for Black communities. We see the impacts on our clients who are denied access to housing, whose children face school disciplinary procedures that put them in the school-to-prison pipeline, who face barriers to re-entering society following incarceration, and who face implicit bias and overt racism that is insidious in governmental systems that determine whether or not they will get the assistance they need.

We have also witnessed the impact of structural and systemic racism within our own organization. We have work to do. Our management and board do not reflect the diversity of our staff or the communities we serve. Training on diversity and inclusion have not been formally adopted in our onboarding and ongoing training of all staff. The creation of safe spaces for staff members to speak about issues relating to race and to privilege has just begun. In fact, the delay in issuing this statement points to our need to intentionally create capacity at the management level to move these organizational efforts forward.

We pledge to do better. We commit ourselves to:

- 1) Taking an honest look at ourselves and our organization.
- 2) Ensuring that our staff of color is not asked to do the heavy lifting to drive change in our own organization.
- 3) Staying in the room with each other to have the difficult conversations.
- 4) Learning about how white supremacy and fragility can be powerful barriers to change.
- 5) Directing that our organizational culture, as well as our policies and procedures, are consistent with principles of racial justice.
- 6) Supporting the work led by our staff in our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee with both resources and time.
- 7) Collaborating with our colleagues at other legal aid organizations through the Shriver Center Racial Justice Institute.
- 8) Deepening our commitment to and developing specific strategies to engage in racial justice-focused community lawyering.
- 9) Re-evaluating our client-facing work with a racial justice lens.
- 10) Strengthening our relationships in the communities we serve to help us to understand and confront the problems facing people in communities of color.

To our staff members, clients, partners, communities, and volunteers - we hear you, we see you, and we stand with you. As George Floyd's brother said so powerfully, "Make It Stop."

**LawNY was founded in 1968 in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty and provides free legal services to low-income and marginalized populations with issues relating to their health, income, housing and family.*

