

State of Maryland

Commission on Civil Rights

“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”



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MARYLAND COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS STATEMENT ON DEREK CHAUVIN VERDICT

The Board of Commissioners and Staff of the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights welcome the verdict in the trial into the responsibility for George Floyd’s death. We hope Derek Chauvin’s guilty verdict brings Mr. Floyd’s family and friends a measure of peace. Martin Luther King, Jr. said “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” It is our profound hope that the justice from this verdict will be a threat to injustice everywhere.

Illegal acts that infringe on the civil rights of our society should never be tolerated, especially by those in positions of public trust. Despite the wealth of evidence – the more than nine minutes of video recorded by bystanders, the testimony of officers against unnecessary force, and the testimony of medical professionals regarding the cause of death – it was uncertain that justice would be done. Sadly, justice and accountability under the law have not always been achieved.

This demonstrates there is much work needed to achieve true civil rights for our brothers and sisters of color. Bias and discrimination remain, on a systemic basis, across our society, including among members of law enforcement. As President Biden said in his April 20, 2021, remarks “systemic racism...is a stain our nation’s soul; the knee on the neck of justice for Black Americans; the profound fear and trauma, the pain, the exhaustion that Black and brown Americans experience every single day.” It is our further hope that this measure of accountability becomes a turning point in the work towards fixing the continued stain of systemic racism that led to Floyd’s death. We have a duty to work toward justice and equality for all people of color facing racism and discrimination.

The experiences people of color have due to systemic racism are not new, they are not unique, and they have not been hidden. The Black Lives Matter movement; the jarring murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd; and the resulting protests have forced America to acknowledge the disparities, bringing these discriminatory experiences into our collective conversations. We must move beyond awareness and talk, and start to take steps toward true equality.

As so aptly expressed by the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg “Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.” The verdict against the former officer’s illegal use of force perpetrated against George Floyd initiates an important step, but not the sole step, towards change. The Board hopes that the verdict is one step toward accountability, one step toward equality in the application of justice, one step toward addressing systemic racism and racial disparities. The proposed George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021 is another potential step.

We look forward, not only as a Commission but also as a nation, to taking the next, overdue step and working toward creating an equitable place to live, work, and play for all.