

The Minnesota Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (MACDL) and its members comprise a core component of the criminal justice system. A criminal justice system that exists to protect the innocent, to right wrongs, and to proportionally punish and rehabilitate those of us who have made mistakes. *A criminal justice system that exists to provide equal justice to all. These are laudable goals. But goals that we are not living up to. Goals that can never be fully achieved if we are unwilling to admit that race and racism play a role in how people are treated in our criminal justice system.*

We, along with the rest of Minnesota, are reeling in the wake of the tragic death of George Floyd. *Heart-wrenching mourning and justifiable outrage share the stage in this tragedy, but both the pain and the outrage must be used to promote long-overdue change. Today, Minnesota is in a position to address the shortcomings that eat at the heart of a system that is expected to protect all of its communities, including its communities of color.*

The individual members of MACDL have always been at the forefront of criminal justice reform. We fight for our clients, whether they are peacefully protesting injustice, rioting in the streets . . . or, yes, charged with murder. Everyone in Minnesota deserves a fair trial, and a fair trial is impossible without zealous representation – for anyone alleged to have committed a crime.

But our commitment to defending *everyone* who is presumed innocent of the charges against them does not temper the overwhelming evidence that our criminal justice system is failing the communities it is supposed to be serving. Now is the time for our elected representatives, our judges, our prosecutors, and our peace officers, *to join us and* come together to aggressively address the current inadequacies in the criminal justice system. The death of George Floyd highlighted, and not for the first time, the need for significant reforms; those who honor Floyd's death will continue to cry in vain unless and until Minnesota unites behind the common goal of *reforming* the oppressive institutions that brought us to this point.

*Communities of color* will rise up, stronger and bolder, even if nothing is done to address the inequality and violence that led up to the most recent protests. And although we have seen time and time again, that these communities will continue to support themselves, continue to heal, with or without needed reforms to the criminal justice system, *it should be clear to all, that this time a "tipping point" has been reached and passed. It is time for action. All communities need the opportunity to thrive because of the support of the criminal justice system, not despite the oppressiveness of the current system.*

The criminal justice system is whatever we, as Minnesotans, make of it. It is supposed to serve and protect *our entire community* – *it is our job to make sure that it does. Every person deserves nothing less. Now is the time for all of us to join together and take swift and comprehensive action.*