

# BOARD OF BAR OVERSEERS

*of the Supreme Judicial Court*

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## STATEMENT BY THE BOARD OF BAR OVERSEERS

We watched in horror as George Floyd was brutally killed by a police officer who choked him for almost nine minutes. The violence and hatred were sickening. The image will remain in our collective national consciousness forever.

The Board of Bar Overseers recognizes the pervasive stain of racism. We condemn bigotry of any sort. We acknowledge that the effects of racism against African Americans have been especially pernicious. For centuries, our nation has witnessed, and often tolerated, overtly racist acts of bondage, Jim Crow, lynching, discrimination, and many other civil rights violations. More than any other factor, racism stymies our efforts to create a society where every person may reach their full potential.

The BBO also acknowledges racism in our justice system. We are aware of the disproportionate impact of arrests and criminal prosecutions on the African American community, including the scourge of mass incarceration. We condemn in the strongest possible terms police brutality against African Americans: the murder of George Floyd is the most recent in a shameless string of murders and assaults by those who are sworn to protect us. We also are aware of the high cost of civil justice, which impedes the ability of all diverse communities to obtain basic rights in court.

As the one organization that oversees all Massachusetts attorneys, we add our voice to the millions who demand an end to systemic racism. As it pertains to our chosen profession, we want our African American colleagues, as well as lawyers of all backgrounds, to know they are a valuable part of our legal community. We stand in solidarity with them.

We urge every attorney in the Commonwealth to be part of the solution. Business as usual is unacceptable because it simply perpetuates the status quo. At the BBO, we commit ourselves to taking concrete steps toward this goal. We will strive to attract a diverse pool of talent to our workforce of lawyers, investigators, and administrative staff. We will work to ensure that our board members and hearing officers are representative of our community. We will aim to make the disciplinary process fair, from start to finish, including continuing our own education about implicit bias and how to address it.

As lawyers, we have a unique obligation to ensure that the law is applied evenly and without bias, particularly when it comes to African Americans. Attorneys should be respected voices in their communities. Our neighbors look to us for leadership; and the time to lead is now. We may no longer remain silent. We must state uncomfortable truths. All of us need to look within ourselves to understand how our own actions, and in many cases our failures to act, have impacted the lives of those who have been subjected to racism and injustice all of their lives. Change is needed. We must listen to the voices of those who have been marginalized. We will do so with open hearts and open minds.

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