

A Statement Regarding the Murder of George Floyd

May 30, 2020

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (Dr. Martin Luther King)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As the proud President of Teamsters Local 502: CASA, the only administrators’ union in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I am compelled to speak out about the senseless murder of George Floyd, who died not only because of the fact that he was African American, but also because of the institutionalized racism that has made such killings a commonplace part of our culture. It is equally important to note that George Floyd follows a long list of African Americans cavalierly killed for sport for either minor violations, or for absolutely nothing at all. Police officers are sworn to serve and protect, not judge and execute, which has become an alternative strategy to enforce vigilante justice against a race of people they apparently do not understand nor seek to understand. To imagine a grown man lying on the ground with a police officer's knee on his neck using his last gasps of breath calling for his mother and children is enough to make any person, regardless of race, cry out with the heart of a human. This is a human rights violation.

George Floyd is not the first African American who uttered the words “I can’t breathe” before he transitioned from this world to the next. The human rights violations in the past few weeks have left us all reeling - Breonna Taylor, who was murdered while sleeping, and Ahmaud Arbery, who was murdered while jogging, committed no crimes other than being born in the skin they were in.

After huge protests across the country, James Curbeam, Chairman of the Teamsters National Black Caucus writes, “The actions of the officers involved have shined a sad and heartbreaking light on Americans, and in turn, are bringing black families, friends and allies, other people of faith and good will, and communities, together across the country in a cry for racial justice. This movement is demanding justice for George Floyd and all of the others who have been wrongly taken.” Andrew Cuomo, Governor of New York denounced the violence, but firmly stands on the sides of the protestors affirming that a broken system must be fixed, “When the prosecutor came out and said there is other evidence but I can’t tell you any more than that, that only incited the frustration. Injustice in the justice system how repugnant to the concept of America.”

While I was proud of the way Philadelphia, known as the City of Brotherly Love, despite having its own sordid history on race relations, started out the day utilizing a peaceful social distancing protest I must admit I was also filled with trepidation of what was to come. Why? I understand that our young people have so much bottled up and currently with schools being closed due to COVID-19, they don't necessarily have all of the coping mechanisms to properly digest ongoing indignities to address such an insurmountable problem in an appropriate way. So, take the current pandemic crisis that has brought the country to its knees, add the murders of three African Americans Breona Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and now George Floyd, which by the way, all three murders having occurred during a small window of time (May 2020) and, one can see, the combustible mix was already at play. Further, without schools being open to engage in meaningful dialogue around such highly charged issues concerning the world in which we live, results were bound to be disastrous. The outcome of a destroyed Center City pains me greatly as we, educators, are currently powerless to properly engage some of our students in a physical sense; yet, we must and we will find ways to get to them as soon as possible virtually to fully explore this situation so that we can begin to repair the damages that have resulted from a history rooted in pain. Although, I must admit almost thankfully, the majority of the looting crowds looked past school age. However, the damage still remains.

As educational leaders of the eighteenth largest district in the United States, the Philadelphia School District, with an overwhelmingly large population of students of color, it is imperative that we land on the right side of history. We will continue to stamp out racism, by first, acknowledging its existence, by educating ourselves, our colleagues, and our students on the devastating impact of racism, and by implementing and teaching using culturally responsive resources. It is imperative that we understand that right now students that we teach and adults that we claim as friends, colleagues, and co-workers are and have been experiencing trauma that has affected them to their very core and may never breathe a word for fear of being ostracized in the workplace by their peers. We have to be there to support to let the entire Nation know that we recognize the disproportionate killings of African Americans by the hands of police officers is not only a "Black" problem but also a human rights problem, and as humans we must all be outraged all of the time and we must be vocal about our outrage..

As a labor union where our members, children and families are our main priorities, we have the collective power to make our voices heard! We have heard from many groups within CASA and we understand that there is a collective pain, frustration, confusion, rage, disconnect, fear, uncertainty, and resiliency taking place, in some cases, at the same time. The need to lead and continue being professional in the midst of so much pain is a daunting task! We recognize that some who are hurting are also putting on a facade just to attempt to numb the ongoing barrage of traumas suffered from witnessing such atrocities, that sadly are still occurring in the twenty-first century. We further recognize that some may be silent, not because they are racist, but because they are not quite sure of how to approach the topic of race and so they remain silent for fear of not saying the right thing. Teamsters Local 502: CASA's stance is that we are a progressive union and we stand

against anything that allows for any class of people to be discriminated against or for the continuation of any kind of racist actions, directly or indirectly.

We will promote anti-racist policies, cultural responsive curriculums, peaceful protests, and engage in intellectual discourse and courageous conversations on difficult topics such as racism.

So, how can CASA members assist to bring calm to our school populations, neighboring communities and to our colleagues as a whole in this virtual setting and beyond? How do we attempt to handle conversations about race and discrimination, among, other things?

- a) Acknowledge that racism exists and its impact
- b) Vote against racist policies
- c) Be aware of subtle signs of bias, discrimination, and racism
- d) Attend professional development sessions to learn about the negative impact of racism
- e) Address biases that you may have concerning people of different races, ethnic groups, religions, sexual orientation, gender, and all other biases.
- f) A few great race and culturally relevant resources to read are as follows:

- 1) Courageous Conversations About Race, Glenn E. Singleton
- 2) Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?, Beverly Daniel Tatum
- 3) White Fragility, Robin Diangelo
- 4) Other People's Children, Lisa Delpit

*This is by no means an exhaustive list

I ask you to stand in solidarity with Teamsters Local 502: CASA as we continue to root out racism, discrimination, bullying, abuses of power, and the disenfranchisement of all American people, not just a select few, in our families, workplaces, institutions, and in our society. Our children's lives depend on it!

In Solidarity,

Robin Cooper, Ed.D

President and Principal Officer of Teamsters Local 502: CASA

(please click on [link](#) for the printable statement)
