

Black Leadership Council: Justice delayed is justice denied

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In 1951 the Civil Rights Commission (CRC) presented a paper to the United Nations at their Paris meetings titled, “We Charge Genocide.” The paper cited the numerous incidents of lynching in the US as well as legal discrimination, disenfranchisement of Blacks, and police brutality as well as disparities in health and other quality of life aspects. The CRC asserted that the U.S. government is both complicit with and responsible for a genocidal situation based on the UN’s own definition of genocide. Today, almost 70 years later we find ourselves in a place where these long-standing grievances still have not been addressed. The brutal death of Mr. George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis Police officers has reinforced how long the African American community has been waiting for the nation to fulfill its promise of the 14th Amendment—equal protection under the law along with the guarantees of life, liberty, and equal justice.

We the members of the Black Leadership Council¹ recognize that Mr. Floyd’s murder has prompted public protests in every state in the nation and in cities throughout the world and brought to the fore underlying causes of a second pandemic—White Supremacy and its twin evil, racism. We owe a debt of gratitude and support to the young adults of all backgrounds in our community who have maintained a steady and vigilant eye on these issues since 2015 with the police slaying of Tony Robinson, an unarmed African American man. Their work helped to organize, lead, and energize peaceful protests in Madison. We do not support other elements of the community (and beyond) determined to destroy property and detract from the central message of justice for Black people through vandalism and looting. The murder of George Floyd requires us to honor his memory by demanding justice via the following changes right here in Madison and Dane County:

Drastic Police Reform: We demand unified use of force guidelines throughout the state by law enforcement. We demand an empowered community oversight committee for the police, a reduction in the over-policing of Black communities, a

reduction in arrests and incarceration of Black people. We demand intensive re-training for police and law enforcement to improve their ability to interact humanely and justly with the Black community. We demand a more inclusive approach to recruiting and hiring police officers. Coupled with these demands we want to see parole reform that allows those who have completed their sentences to have a real chance at life after prison and funding for a civil rights division at the Department of Justice. We demand that there be parole reform such as allowing those who are no longer on felony supervision to vote and to prohibit lack of the ability to pay restitution fees to be a barrier to the franchise.

Economic Development: In order for the Black community to participate in what has been a robust Dane County economy we demand a sustainable program for Black businesses. We need a focus on Black businesses such as barber shops, beauty salons, catering services, and others who are suffering as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and/or street uprisings that followed peaceful protests. Many of these businesses were closed out of the Federal CARES act through the Payroll Protection Program because of the lending practices of area banks.

Education: We demand drastic and immediate improvement in Black students' academic achievement, school participation, and high school graduation. We demand aggressive recruitment of Black teachers to meet the needs of our students. We also demand serious and fair consideration of Black school leaders as superintendents and principals throughout Dane County. We demand the opportunity to participate in the reinstatement of school in the post-COVID-19 era. We want insurance that Black students have access to technology (both devices and Wi-Fi). We want support for parents who because of their work demands or limited education cannot provide academic experiences for their children. We demand that schools break the school-to-prison pipeline by reducing the high suspensions and expulsion rates of Black students. We demand alternatives to arrest of Black students that may include work-study opportunities or other traditional school alternatives. As a long-term strategy, we want free tuition for Wisconsin Black students who attend college in Wisconsin. We want the University of Wisconsin-Madison to actively and aggressively recruit, admit, and support more Black students and Black faculty.

Health: In the midst of the social tragedy of Mr. Floyd's murder we are fighting the pandemic of COVID-19—a disease that disproportionately effects African Americans. This disproportionality is linked to both social conditions and underlying causes. We demand that Dane County ensure that its Black citizens are covered by adequate health care and access to health care providers. This means that services will have to be available in both traditional and community settings. We need mental health

services (with more Black mental health providers) available in our churches and community facilities.

We make these demands because we are deeply committed to what sociologist Harry Edwards calls, moving from “protest to actual, tangible progress!”