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THE TIME IS NOW – A CALL FOR CHANGE AND UNITY

A Statement of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts Regarding Police Reform Legislation

The sin of racism and struggle for racial justice has been part of our nation's history for centuries. Awareness of both has never been absent, but too often both themes have been marginalized. Periodically, they are brought to the forefront of common discourse, most often triggered by aggressive, violent, or horrific acts perpetrated on members of our African American, Latino, and other minority communities. As a result, serious discussions regarding how society acts and reacts to alter the culture of discrimination, violence, ignorance and indifference often occur and appear to gain momentum. Meaningful debate raises expectations that society will finally emerge from the culture of racism. However, as history has shown, those discussions ultimately fade into the background as time elapses and other seemingly pressing issues make any change less urgent and somehow less important.

That collective mindset and cycle of inaction must end now. The time is upon us as a society to take responsibility for our actions. Racial injustice, bigotry, scorn and intolerance against individuals based upon their religion, ancestry, ethnicity or skin color must end now. Excuses for hate filled behavior can no longer be tolerated. We are all created equal in the eyes of God and all human lives are to be valued and protected. It is upon us to make that human equality the norm - not the exception.

As the four Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts, we pledge our full support to the cultural shift towards meaningful reforms in the area of racial injustice. As a country and a commonwealth of immigrants from all regions of the world, we must join together as one race - the human race. We must learn from our mistakes. We must learn from our passive acceptance of inaction and not let this opportunity fade into the background. Today and every day until reforms are implemented, this must be the pressing issue of the day. We must seize this opportunity with energy, determination and vigor. We must act now – it is our collective responsibility.

Police Reform Legislation

The underlying racial injustice and inequality issues we face are countless. They include, but are not limited to, education, housing, employment, law enforcement, the judiciary and many more. As Bishops, we take this opportunity to specifically voice our support of the efforts of Governor Baker and the legislature as they craft a bill to enact meaningful police reform.

We acknowledge the vast majority of the police officers in the state of Massachusetts are capable and honorable public servants who serve and protect all residents with distinction. We also acknowledge that racial biases have infiltrated the mindsets and actions of some police officers. Those are the individuals targeted by the legislation currently being debated by our lawmakers. That legislation is a step in the direction of meaningful change and is the reason we support our elected officials in their efforts to address these systematic problems.

As Catholic Bishops we do not pretend to know the business of policing. However, recent violent police actions from across the country inform us that methods, tactics, training, attitudes and biases must be addressed to bring about better policing. These fundamental changes must be done with the expertise, input, and cooperation from as many resources as possible - especially those who have experienced racial injustice firsthand.

To that end, we are encouraged that so many individuals and organizations in the minority community are deeply involved in the effort to reform the laws and professional standards inherent in effective policing. The NAACP of Boston, the Black and Latino Legislative Caucus, religious leaders, elected officials in our cities and towns, police unions and countless other individuals and groups have stepped forward to help effectuate change.

The United States of America is a country of hopes, dreams, ideals and ideas. To that end, many specific ideas have emerged as the legislature considers the different proposals. We do not choose to endorse a particular bill as the legislative process unfolds, nor do we dismiss the critical service police officers provide to maintain law and order and public safety throughout the commonwealth.

On the other hand, we strongly support legislation that draws the best ideas from each bill creating a best practice model for meaningful reform. Although there are differences in the qualified immunity debate which must be rectified, not surprisingly a common vision has emerged. It is a vision that embraces a unified, systematic desire to enact legislation that will have permanent ramifications. The specifics will be debated and vetted over the next ten days as we near the conclusion of the legislative session.

The killing of George Floyd at the hands of officers of the Minneapolis police department finally triggered a movement that will not be deterred, will not be silent and will not die. Laws need to be changed across the country. We have been given the opportunity to contribute to that change in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This will be a defining moment in Massachusetts history.

As we celebrate the life of United States Congressman John Lewis of Georgia and his unyielding commitment to the principal of equality, let us not forget why he lived – to end racism for all Americans.

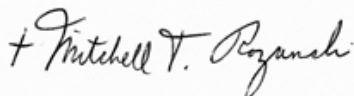
The time has come for all of us to do our part to end racism and unite as one race. That time is now, let us seize this opportunity always remembering more work will remain.



His Eminence Seán P. O'Malley, OFM, Cap.
Archbishop of Boston



Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester



Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski
Bishop of Springfield



Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV
Bishop of Fall River

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