

October 26, 2020

Via email and regular mail

Michael Sherwin
Acting United States Attorney
District of Columbia
555 4th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Mr. Sherwin:

As former members of the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, we write to express our support for the effort to implement meaningful reforms in response to the crisis in our criminal justice system.

Today we face a national reckoning over systemic failures in the criminal justice system. The tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many other Black people at the hands of the police have provoked outrage and galvanized support for changing the rules that govern policing. But racial injustice persists at every stage of the criminal justice process, from charging decisions to sentencing to incarceration.

As the largest U.S. Attorney's Office in the nation and the only federal office responsible for prosecuting local crimes, our Office has a unique obligation to take a stand against this injustice and to serve as a national leader in the quest for racial equality.

To this end, a Working Group of Black AUSAs recently has developed a compelling and constructive set of recommendations. These recommendations address both internal changes to the office and significant policy reforms. Internally, the group recommends the appointment of a Diversity and Inclusion Office and a Restorative Justice and Diversion Coordinator, as well as the adoption of robust implicit bias training for the staff. The group also recommends a set of important policy proposals. These proposals focus on charging decisions in gun possession cases and building a stronger relationship with the D.C. community. As the working group points out, prosecutors must take tangible steps to understand the needs and circumstances of local residents and to earn the trust of the community they serve.

As a proud group of former USAO-DC prosecutors, many of whom served in various roles in the Department of Justice over many years, we are bound by our dedication to the Office and to the cause of justice. We are heartened by reports that the Office is reviewing the working group's concerns. Internal discussion of these issues and the working group's recommendations will make the Office stronger and ensure it is evolving to meet the needs of a changing city.

At the same time, we firmly believe that concrete action is imperative now. It is time to institute measures—along the lines of those recommended by the working group—that make the criminal justice system more just and fair. Our Office, working with the defense bar and the bench, should be leading the way on these reforms.

We appreciate your consideration of our views and look forward to continuing to support the mission of the Office going forward.

SIGNED:

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