

#Handsup: Public Defenders Stand in Solidarity

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Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for being here today to support issues that are in theory as basic as “justice and equality,” but in reality are as complicated as rocket science or astro-physics.

Simply because the issues and solutions may be complicated as they involve matters related to human behavior, systemic dysfunction and race relations does not mean that we should not roll up our sleeves and begin to diagnose and prescribe. Well, enough of the scientific metaphors.

As Charles Hamilton Houston so eloquently stated many years ago, and it is no less relevant now than it was then: “A lawyer is either a social engineer or a parasite.”

I am here today to put out a “call to action” to all lawyers in the Bay Area, including myself, to NOT be parasites, but for us to be part of the change that society so desperately needs right now.

Here is some of what we know about the problem:

- In San Francisco, blacks make up approximately 6% of the population, but make up 53% of those in custody and jail
- Police involved shootings involving white officers vs. black officers have starkly different statistics
- The shootings and the disparity among citizens of color and other citizens is a function of:
 - Training
 - How and where policing takes place within cities
 - Fear and lack of trust and respect on both sides of the equation
 - Racial profiling and whether there is real value in racial profiling
 - Finger pointing will NOT help. It is not one agency or department or one component of our population that is at fault. We are ALL responsible for where we are at this point

San Francisco attorneys are known for being brilliant legal minds. We are lawyers with a heart in this city and we are often national leaders on very tough issues. This time should be no different.

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Lawyers work within the justice system every day, we understand the justice system and in fact in many ways we help to design the justice system through our work.

The Bar Association of San Francisco and its over 7,500 members believe in and have historically acted within our mission which reads in part that we “champion equal access to justice and promote humanity, excellence, and diversity in the legal profession.”

The issue of officer killings of young black men at disparate rates is at the core of championing justice and humanity.

San Francisco has a unique opportunity to be a part of the solution. We have the opportunity to show leadership to the nation and to show how we can be thoughtful, strategic and effective in coming up with solutions to this very critical and sensitive in our country.

We have seen and have had sit-ins, die-ins, lie-ins, protests, town hall meetings and rallies. It is time to get to work lawyers! Let's come together, utilize our legal training and roll up our sleeves and put our analytical and problem-solving minds together to begin to change how we manage the racial inequity in our criminal justice system in this country. When young boys continue to die at the hands of those who are charged with serving and protecting them, we have a crisis on our hands.

Where do we begin?

- We begin by coming together as a task force
- We look at and analyze the facts and the statistics from wing-to-wing of our justice system.....from policing to sentencing
- We measure outcomes of efforts that have been made and will be made
- We publicize and applaud proven successful outcomes and efforts

We as lawyers can engineer the social change we need to stop this.

We can turn the rhetoric and outcry into meaning change and continued effort toward equal justice and humanity.

Will YOU stand and work with us?

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The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) is a nonprofit voluntary membership organization of over 8,000 attorneys, law students and legal professionals in the Bay Area. Founded in 1872, BASF is one of the largest and most dynamic



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metropolitan bar associations in the U.S., with a long and distinguished record of community action, public service and service to the legal profession.