

Message To DJJ Employees: A Call To Action (Part 1)

The past few weeks have been extremely trying times for us all. In addition to dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic, we also now find ourselves living in a time of even greater turmoil. This turmoil has been created, in part, by the recent unexplainable deaths of three unarmed people of color. George Floyd was a Black man who died when he was restrained with a knee to the neck by a police officer for over 8 minutes during an arrest in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Breyonna Taylor was a Black female first responder who was shot 8 times by police officers during a drug raid of the wrong home during the middle of the night in Louisville, Kentucky. Ahmaud Arbery was a young Black male jogging through a predominantly white neighborhood in Brunswick, Georgia, who was shot and killed after being followed and confronted by a father and son who thought he looked suspicious. As folks have grappled with the circumstances surrounding these deaths and the lack of swift and appropriate responses from authorities, we have seen protests jump up all over the country, some of which have become violent with rioting and looting.

Such situations conjure up all sorts of emotions within us and we view them from our own lens. Our perspectives are formed in large part from our lived experiences. I am struck by the diverse group of individuals who have come together to lend support to this cause and ask for more humane treatment of people of color at the hands of law enforcement. I understand that there are even protests of solidarity occurring in other countries around the world.

As a Black woman in America, I struggle with my own feelings about the loss of these lives and other individuals before them in similar situations. I can't get the image out of my head of a young Black boy holding a sign that read "Am I Next?" I imagine that most of us can agree that the loss of life is uncalled for as is the destruction of businesses owned by innocent additional victims of these trying times.

This situation provides an opportunity for self-reflection as we consider our thoughts and reactions to the scenarios that play out day in and day out across our communities. It also presents an opportunity for action. What can or should we do? For me, it often starts with a look in the mirror. What can I do as an individual and also what can we do as an agency within our sphere of control?

Stay tuned for Part II to this e-mail where we can begin to explore this opportunity for action further.