

Joint Statement of Washington Minority Bar Associations Regarding Events in Charlottesville

Issued August 18, 2017

Last weekend, the city of Charlottesville, Virginia, experienced reprehensible acts of violence at the hands of an emboldened white nationalist movement. Lives were lost, dozens of people were injured, and the aftermath has thrown race relations in our country into a state of national turmoil.

As attorneys who lead diverse, statewide bar associations throughout Washington, we urge the United States Department of Justice to investigate all acts of domestic terrorism committed in the name of white supremacy or white nationalism. The actions on display in Charlottesville over the past weekend were not only disturbing and reprehensible, but many of them may have also likely violated both federal and state laws. The United States government, alongside the State of Virginia, should use all its appropriate resources to prosecute any members of these white nationalist and white supremacist groups who engaged in illegal behavior.

We recognize and appreciate that the First Amendment is a critical facet of our democracy. As lawyers, we unwaveringly support its protections, even if we do not agree with the statements being made. However, violence, threats, and physical intimidation are not protected by the First Amendment and have no place in a civil dialogue.

We as attorneys share a duty with government leaders to speak up when injustice occurs in order to reassure our communities, including those communities that are minority or historically disadvantaged, that we will use all resources at our disposal, including legal resources, to protect the rights and safety of everyone. Given President Trump's failure to unequivocally condemn racist and white separatist groups after the incidents in Charlottesville, it is now more important than ever that we as members of the legal profession step in to fill the void.

This is a country governed by laws. Our laws are designed not only to protect democratic principles, but also to protect people from violence and harassment in the guise of political speech. Our various bar associations pledge to work vigorously to ensure that those ideals work in practice as well as in principle. We will not tolerate anything less for the people of Washington.

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Donna Cochener, President, Mother Attorneys Mentoring Association of Seattle (MAMA Seattle)

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