

It Is Time to Stand Up for Racial Equality and Justice

(June 4, 2020)

“Once again, we are witness to pain and tragedy: the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, with three other officers aiding and abetting. Many of us have the luxury of experiencing police encounters that are helpful and protective, but that is not the case for our brothers and sisters of color. A person of color loses his dignity and sometimes his life with police encounters. I stand with those who are peacefully demonstrating to bring about change.

The death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer who was arresting him over an alleged fake \$20 bill has sparked universal outrage. Racism is so ingrained in our institutions and in the exercise of power that the value of “blind and impartial justice” that this country has always espoused feels like a myth. I hope that the Minnesota prosecutors and courts will hold the police officers involved in George Floyd’s death accountable. That is a necessary first step toward change.

In Virginia, I will work to ensure that police receive training on how to de-escalate encounters and commit to using the minimum amount of force necessary to control the situation. I am continuing to listen and learn from those who have personal experiences with our broken system. Every Virginian must be able to work, learn, and live without fear of harassment, prejudice, violence, or deadly force — particularly from those charged with serving and protecting all communities. The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus has already identified 28 recommendations and 33 action steps to achieve a reduction in deadly force encounters. I support reform. We must all work together to bring about a more perfect union.

I understand that the protests have been about more than just deadly force by police officers. “I can’t breathe” began as one man’s heart-breaking plea for his life, and has grown quickly to a greater plea for recognition and redress of an unfair hard reality lived each day by too many of our friends and neighbors. “I can’t breathe” is shining a bright light on necessary systemic and societal changes. Black Americans have been denied justice and equality for far too long. We have much work to do.

I will be listening to more community conversations in the coming weeks. Please do not hesitate to reach out to my office with any comments, concerns, or ideas.

Thank you for your willingness to make a difference.”