

PRESIDENT

Lawrence Zimmerman
Marietta

PRESIDENT ELECT

Kimberly A. Dymecki
Atlanta

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Jason Sheffield
Decatur

VICE PRESIDENTS

District #1

A – Gabe Cliett
Statesboro

B - Jason Clark
Brunswick

District #2

A - Sherry Widner
Blakely

B – Lon Kemeness
Tifton

District #3

A - Nyonnohweah Seekie
Macon

B - Michelle Sandler
Columbus

District #4

A - LeeAnne Lynch
Decatur

B – Rick Ryczek
Lawrenceville

C - J. Steven Purvis
Conyers

District #5

Michael Brill
Manal Chehimi
Natasha Crawford

John A. Garland
Teri Thompson
Atlanta

District #6

A – James Boles
Stockbridge

B – Brian Lockerbie
LaGrange

District #7

A - Russell Hetzel
Roswell

B - Karen Wilkes
Rome

District #8

A - Sean Brodie
Gray

B – Clay Tapley
Dublin

District #9

A - Ralph Hinman
Dalton

B – Drew Powell
Clarksville

C - William S. Hardman, Jr.
Gainesville

District #10

A - Charles Rollins
Augusta

B – Allie McCarthy
Athens

SECRETARY

Natasha Silas
Atlanta

TREASURER

Elizabeth Brandenburg
Decatur

PARLIAMENTARIAN

Ashleigh Merchant
Marietta

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jill Travis
Atlanta

Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

215 Church Street
Suite 111
Decatur, GA 30030
(404) 248-1777
Fax: (404) 248-1666

19 June 2020

Statement on the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Need for Change:

The Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (GACDL) publicly and emphatically joins the global movement for long overdue change in our criminal legal system, brought to the forefront by the recent tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and unfortunately, so many others.

As criminal defense lawyers, we question and hold accountable individuals in power and challenge laws and legal cultures that perpetuate inequality and the abuse of power. The routine and unjust targeting of people of color by law enforcement is impossible to ignore. GACDL calls on our local, state, and national leaders to re-imagine policing and public safety. History has shown that our criminal legal system is racist and cruel including discriminating against those without means. For example, when there is a budget problem, taking funds from the public defender system (designed to protect indigent people from the all-powerful government) causes further disparity in the judicial system.

Every three seconds a person is arrested in the United States. According to the FBI, of the 10.3 million arrests a year, only 5 percent are for offenses involving violence. All other arrests are for nonviolent offenses, including minor infractions like forgery, the alleged crime that the officers who killed George Floyd arrived to investigate; selling single cigarettes without a tax stamp, the alleged offense that Eric Garner lost his life for; or for marijuana or other drug offenses.

GACDL stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter protesters agitating for change in policing, prosecution, and punishment in our country and in our state. As criminal defense attorneys, we know intimately the violence of mass incarceration and have spent our careers fighting for dignity, compassion, and mercy. Day in and day out in courtrooms across Georgia, we advocate for additional opportunities for our clients to obtain treatment, keep their jobs, and stay home with their families.

GACDL demands radical changes to our criminal legal system and wholeheartedly supports the Black Lives Matter movement and all positive action taken to end all forms of discrimination in the criminal legal system. Money saved from reducing the size and scope of police departments must be reinvested into community-based services that are better suited to respond to actual community needs. Doing so will foster improved safety and health outcomes and promote opportunity in Black communities, where decades of underinvestment in everything except policing has aided and abetted the mass incarceration crisis. There is also a resounding need to change the way state and local law enforcement and state corrections officers are held accountable in civil proceedings by eliminating qualified immunity. When those who carry a badge and a gun and are authorized to use force on the state’s behalf have violated a person’s basic civil rights, they should be forced to answer for their actions.

It is past time for the lives of Black and Brown people to be treated with the same dignity as their white counterparts. GACDL commits to working on all fronts – in the courtroom, the legislature, in our communities, and in this organization – to bring us closer to a more just and humane world for all, regardless of their color or zip code.