



PennState Law

Message of Support to Our Black Community and Tonight's Penn State Lawyers Zoom Gathering (8 pm EDT):

Dear Members of our Penn State Lawyers Community,

I join President Barron in [expressing sadness and anger and recognizing the need for change](#) in response to the death of George Floyd and so many others. This occurs in the broader context of our country passing 100,000 COVID-19 deaths with disproportionate impact on communities of color. I know that there are many in our Penn State Lawyers community who are hurting right now, and I encourage all of us to support each other and work together to address hatred and bias. Our [Penn State Lawyers zoom](#) gathering planned at 8 pm tonight will be a time for listening and reflection in addition to hearing from Tom Sharbaugh about the work of the Entrepreneur Assistance Clinic helping businesses impacted by COVID.

I am grateful for the [moving and powerful statement by our Black Law Students Association leaders](#), and think it is critical that we listen and are supportive allies. We need to amplify their voices and work in partnership to take concrete steps to be antiracist and to address racist violence, police brutality, and racial profiling, and their profound – and often deadly – impacts on the Black community.

Progress is too slow. The recent deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Sean Reed, Nina Pop, Christian Taylor, and Tony McDade follow the losses of so many others. It is unacceptable that our Black friends, neighbors, colleagues, and community members have to be afraid for themselves and those they love. Although I never will be able to completely understand what our BLSA students and other Black community members are experiencing, I stand with them, hear them, and value them. My heart aches and I grieve with them.

I think it is critical that we turn that commitment into meaningful action and want to make sure that we listen and amplify Black voices in the way that we do so. I have reached out to BLSA, SBA, and other student, faculty, staff, alumni, and board leaders on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues to develop our next steps.

I appreciate our BLSA and SBA leaders collaborating to develop a conversation for our community this Thursday on race relations and movie night. I plan to attend to listen, learn, and reflect, and encourage all members of our community to participate. I also will be meeting with our BLSA and SBA leaders this week to listen, and look forward to listening to our students at the Information and Listening Session this Wednesday at noon, and to [our Penn State Lawyers at 8 pm tonight](#).

As our BLSA and SBA students eloquently addressed in their letters to our community, a commitment to antiracism includes work on implicit and explicit bias in ourselves, our community, and the broader society. Lawyers have an obligation to promote justice and fight bias and hate that includes protecting Black lives and Black human rights. We need to be honest about our own biases and work on them. We need to call out racism when we see it, and then help to stop it. I appreciate the SBA sharing anti-bias training resources. I plan to explore, together with our Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, Assistant Dean for Students, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and student leaders – with input from faculty, staff, students, and alumni – how we can most effectively provide anti-bias training at Penn State Law.

I also think it is important that Penn State Law contribute to needed law and policy reform and advocacy, something the law schools and lawyers are uniquely situated to positively impact. Law and policy are critical tools in that needed change, but also often fall short in stopping hate and bias. Our Penn State Law faculty, staff, and students are doing important work to address inequity and bridge access to justice gaps. I plan to listen to our community's ideas on what additional forms our contribution might take here and collaborate to implement them in ways that build upon efforts taking place elsewhere. In addition to this work on police brutality and racialized violence, I am in the process of developing an initiative, in partnership with other leaders at Penn State and around the country, to bring together and build upon the many efforts to address COVID-19 and inequity. I look forward to exploring with all of you additional opportunities to collaborate to make a difference.

Unfortunately, over the past several days, there have been reports of racist behavior on social media by individuals reported to be Penn State students, and also other racist comments and abhorrent social media posts by individuals reported to be Penn State students. I join the University in condemning all racist comments and hate-filled actions, which do not reflect our values. The staff are verifying individuals that may have been involved and reaching out to those in question.

We have work to do. I look forward to doing it together. Please let us know any way we can be supportive.

Warmly,
Hari Osofsky
Dean of Penn State Law and the School of International Affairs