The Center for Appellate Litigation joins with the community of public defenders and advocates to call for justice in the wake of the tragic deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Tony McDade at the hands of police. We mourn the loss of their lives, as well as of countless others whose lives have been extinguished by the deeply entrenched forces of white supremacy and state violence.

These incidents are not isolated but rather part of a centuries-long pattern of subjugation. They are the most recent manifestations of white supremacy, this nation's oldest and most pervasive disease, whose symptoms include a police officer kneeling for nearly nine minutes on the neck of a man pleading for his life, and a white woman in Central Park weaponizing her privilege by invoking fear of an "African-American man" on a 911 call. Protests in response are both a collective howl of frustration and an attempt to bring about systemic change and accountability.

We stand with the protesters in calling for a reimagined world in which no one has to experience racial terror, and we condemn efforts to marginalize their cause. As public defenders who work with and for those who suffer from incessant police violence and intimidation, we see every day how people, the vast majority Black and Latinx, are funneled into the criminal legal system because of structural racism. This brutality is now on such blatant display in videos appearing regularly in the news, where they are exposing exactly the sort of tactics our clients report, but that are rarely believed to be true.

To that end, we call upon elected officials at all levels to enact meaningful structural change. In NYC, this means reallocating funds toward health, mental health, housing, and educational resources in the communities that need them the most. It means ceasing attacks on peaceful protesters, who are exercising their First Amendment rights to gather, to call out injustice, and to ask their leaders for change. Those who have been arrested for protesting must be immediately released, and officers who are engaging in brutality towards protesters--and otherwise--must be held accountable.

Statewide, necessary measures to increase accountability, such as the repeal of Civil Rights Law Sec. 50-a, which shields police disciplinary records from public view, are long overdue. We also urge the adoption of sentencing and other reforms, such as the Less Is More Act, which eliminates the possibility of reincarceration for technical parole violations and offers time credits against parole terms. Marijuana should be legalized, with concomitant investment in communities historically and disproportionately targeted by law enforcement.
Mass incarceration is the other side of the coin of overpolicing, and we call for prompt action to drastically decarcerate and to undo decades of policies that have served to perpetuate structural racism. As many of our clients languish in prison during the COVID-19 pandemic, we call upon the Governor and Department of Corrections and Community Supervision immediately to release those who are vulnerable or have served the majority of their sentences. This is not sufficient, but it is a necessary step toward decarceration.

We stand firm in our belief that Black Lives Matter, and continue to push for justice and freedom for all.