

Dean's Message on Police Violence Against Black Civilians

The social work profession stands with people who are disproportionately affected by structural racism and violence, particularly violence carried out by the state against civilians. We are deeply saddened and upset by the failure of our judicial system to hold accountable the police officers responsible for the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Their deaths do not occur in isolation. Rather, they reflect a long history of disempowerment and dehumanization, often as a result of racially discriminatory state actions. Black, Native and Latino communities in particular are targets for aggressive policing. The disproportionate use of force against members of our own community, particularly against Black men and other people of color, is intolerable.

As a community of conscience, Berkeley Social Welfare cannot remain silent. We are part of a longstanding Berkeley tradition of non-violent demonstration and civil disobedience. We should be heartened by the peaceful call to action that has sprung up across the United States and particularly in the Bay Area. We are proud of the members of our community who have vigorously taken part in peaceful protests and also recognize that many within law enforcement and the judicial system also seek change. We condemn the small fraction of others who have used protests as an excuse for further violence.

Berkeley Social Welfare will build on this momentum of peaceful protest to continue a dialogue on structural and systemic racism, violence, and police impunity. As social workers, we must be part of a healing and reconciliation process that acknowledges and attempts to dismantle the pernicious effects of racism. To that end, we repeat and add to the words of our colleagues at Portland State University and Smith College and call upon our conscience community to:

- “Participate in non-violent social and political actions to interrupt oppressive practices and promote systemic changes;
- Engage in critical dialogue about the systemic forces of race and racism that shape our relationships and communities;
- Support those who are most affected by oppression and injustices inherent in our systems;
- Advocate for policies that support alternatives to policing including community-based approaches to safety and conflict resolution; “ (Portland State University, 2014)
- Develop new scholarship to provide a platform for positive change in our society; and
- Promote evidence-informed solutions to dismantle biased institutions and practices.

Berkeley Social Welfare will continue this dialogue with an open discussion on structural discrimination to be held early in the Spring semester 2015. We also will work as a community to address ongoing issues and develop local strategies for collective support and social change.