

Statement from University of Maryland, School of Social Work Community
Regarding the Deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown

The University of Maryland, School of Social Work stands in solidarity with people demanding justice in response to the recent Grand Jury decisions not to indict police officers Daniel Pantaleo and Darren Wilson for their responsibility in the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown. Such incidents reflect a historical pattern of systemic racism toward African American people and discrimination and violence toward many people of color. These incidents have occurred in every region of the nation, including the Baltimore-Washington area. As social workers who are committed to social justice, we are obligated to speak out against racism in all its forms, including racial profiling, “stop and frisk” policies, and “stand your ground” laws.

In addition, we are professionally obligated to address structural racism in our communities and the inequitable and racialized outcomes it produces. This requires us to revise the conversation about racism from one that focuses on individual behavior and personal biases to one which connects racism at the individual level with the multiple forms of institutional racism that recent events in the criminal justice system have underscored.

We join our colleagues from Smith College, Columbia University, Portland State University, many other schools of social work; the National Association of Social Workers; and many international organizations who have spoken out in response to the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. With them, we call on the social work community to join in the following actions:

- Provide immediate and sustained support of those closest to these struggles, such as supporting families who have lost loved ones to police brutality, supporting legislation, and holding teach-ins about structural racism;
- Engage in non-violent social and political actions to demand systemic change that promote justice, safeguard human rights, and ensure fair and equitable treatment and respect for all people;
- Initiate a critical dialogue about the systemic forces of racism that shape us and construct and constrict our perceptions about, and relationships with, others;
- Investigate and analyze the many ways racism and structural oppression and structural inequities affect our communities—the places we live, work, and study; and
- Develop community, family, group, and individual approaches to begin healing from the pain and suffering caused by these events and the related trauma.