



April 22, 2015

Dear SSW Community and Friends,

Last week, I began writing this letter in response to the killings of unarmed black men by police that had happened this month—Eric Harris in Oklahoma and Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina. Before I could complete the writing, another unarmed black man died in my home town, Baltimore, after his spine was severed while in police custody. Freddie Gray was 25 years old. The rising death toll of unarmed black men and women at the hands of police is outrageous and shameful to our nation.

According to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 76 unarmed people of color died at the hands of police from 1999 to 2014. The number is well over 80 now with the deaths that have occurred in 2015. The UConn School of Social Work community is shocked and appalled by these continuing injustices. In response, faculty, students, staff, administrators and community collaborators have engaged in a variety of social justice awareness programs at the School. In 2015, we have hosted the following activities:

- *Strategic Planning Meeting on Criminal Justice Reform* – March 3  
John Bonelli and Robert Rooks (MSW '99), Organizing Director for Californians for Safety and Justice, co-facilitated the planning efforts of students, staff, faculty, administrators, and community collaborators to build a human rights agenda to address mass incarceration and related issues. Sponsored by John Bonelli and SSW Students.
- *Stop Mass Incarceration Week: A Vigil and Speak Out* – April 6 – 9  
Presentations by current MSW and PhD students, alumni and community practitioners on topics including using desistance and empowerment as a framework, restorative justice programs, and success strategies for working with formerly incarcerated individuals; Speak Out and vigil; film; and panel discussion. Sponsored by SSW Students and Hartford Action.
- *Six Principals of Kingian Nonviolence* – April 8  
Presented by the Connecticut Center for Nonviolence (CTCN) located at the School of Social Work. Sponsored by the Just Community Student Sub-committee.
- *Student Teach-In* – April 9  
Students presented throughout the day on topics such as labor and economic justice, mass incarceration, police brutality, civil disobedience, anti-racist community organizing, and action planning. Sponsored by Graduate Student Organization.

- *Field Instructors Workshop – Friday, April 24*  
*Working with Men of Color and Their Families in this Era of Mass Incarceration*  
Sponsored by Field Education Department.

As Dean of the School, I am inspired and encouraged by the commitment to social justice that our SSW Community has demonstrated, especially our students, who have taken leadership roles.

These awareness raising and planning activities are a step toward the multi-pronged, multi-systemic strategies that are needed to address death by police, police brutality, mass incarceration, and related issues. I have reached out to NASW/CT to expand the process of coalition building to develop strategies to address these social justice issues in the State of Connecticut. Of course, faculty, staff, and students who have been involved in activism around these issues will be invited to participate in the planning process.

As a social worker, an African-American woman, and the mother of two adult sons, I grieve for the families who have lost sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, grandchildren, and grandparents. My heart aches for the communities who have lost members, and I feel our collective trauma that our lives are treated as having little value. Despite the enormity and complexity of the issues, we can and we must find effective ways to stem the tide of violence and injustice to create a more just future.

Sincerely,



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