

Tanya D. Woods' Statement | June 1, 2020 |

To my fellow Chicagoans,

I work in solidarity with black, Latinx and white people, leading a legal aid organization. I am grateful to be a part of a community that is so committed to justice, so knowledgeable of the rights to which we are entitled, and so resilient in pursuit of that which is fair and right. I am also thankful that I have been charged with a role that allows me to remain close to the struggles of my community, and to be trusted to work with others to seek solutions. Finally, I am optimistic that pain we're feeling these days will not result in our defeat; now more than ever, I believe we will never be defeated.

There is no act of evil, conspiracy or racism that can successfully extinguish our spirit. The wanton murder of George Floyd has sparked our community of organizers and activists into action – but it's a fervor and passion with which we are familiar.

Communities in Los Angeles, Detroit, Miami, Cincinnati, Ferguson, Atlanta, Baltimore, and yes, Chicago, have each been pushed to a similar passion over the last six decades, emotions justified by violence against black Americans. However, I feel excited by the prospect for this particular spark to result not only in an explosion of emotion, but also in a slow-burn of strategic, systemic change.

Yes, the change we seek will come *slowly*. Enlisting ally-ships to ensure our movements are equitable will take time. Convincing ourselves that internal disagreement and conflict is ok and that our thinking will not and should not be monolithic will take time. Negotiating between which parts of our social, political and policing systems must go or stay will take time. But, like our community's spirit, the slow-burn I speak of must not be extinguished when the protests end or when Twitter's trending topics change.

People have asked me, "How can I help?" You can commit to the community-at-large. Collaborate in whatever way you can with justice organizations like mine. Our missions are evolving, but our visions of a better future for our city are consistent. To get there, we must ask ourselves tough questions. What does effective leadership for liberation and justice look like? What is the community's need for policing? How do we correct discrepancies between that need and police departments' current roles? Which policies are most relevant on a daily basis to the lives of the least privileged among us, and how do we elevate those folks to positions to advocate for changes in these policies?

So, I leave you with this charge: join me in the slow-burn.

Rest in power, George Floyd. Black Lives Matter.

- Tanya D. Woods, executive director, Westside Justice Center