



A Letter from Chief Justice Robinson

For many Americans, the tragic death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, was a tipping point in their understanding that equal justice under the law is an ideal that too often is unrealized. Having watched our nation's grief and pain in the weeks that followed the death of Mr. Floyd, I was moved to send an open letter to the judges and employees of the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch, asking them to join me in doubling—and even tripling—our efforts to provide equal justice for all who are served by the Judicial Branch. I am honored to have been asked by the CT Lawyer Advisory Committee to share that letter with you, the members of the Bar of the State of Connecticut. I hope that you will continue to be our partners in the continued struggle to assure that all who come into contact with Connecticut's legal system—in any matter civil or criminal—have an assurance that they will be treated fairly and with respect.

Dear Judicial Branch Family:

I am writing to you in response to the recent events in our country that are affecting each one of us. I believe that in some ways the pain being felt by the members of our Judicial Branch family is unique because of the nature of our work and for what I hope is a commitment of every one of us to provide equal justice to all.

These are very troubling times. Our senses have been bombarded with a constant stream of scenes of horrific injustices that have been and still are occurring across this nation. It was fifty-five years ago that Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. came to Middletown, Connecticut, to deliver a sermon at Wesleyan University. During that sermon, Dr. King said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

I know that there are some people who do not believe that there is racial injustice in the United States. However, as events in my own life, as well as events in this country throughout the years have informed me, indeed there is. People who do not believe that we have a racial injustice problem are entitled to their own opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts. Simply put the facts are with me. I love this country enough to speak out when it is not living up to its ideals. I love this country despite its imperfections, but that does not mean that I am willing to accept them. In fact, I am ready, willing and able to do the work to eradicate them. To paraphrase Albert Camus, I can love my country and still love justice.

I must make it clear that I am not disparaging law enforcement or our judicial systems, but I am saying that they are not perfect institutions. I am outraged by some of the things that I have seen and heard. With each new revelation my heart breaks even more and like many of you, I have long since reached the point

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that, as Fannie Lou Hamer once said, “I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

The existing imperfections in our justice systems have profound and lasting effect on all of us, but it is more severe on those of us who are the most vulnerable. There is a need for real and immediate improvement. America can—and must—do a better job of providing “equal justice under law,” the very words that are engraved on the front of the United States Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C. I believe that our justice system is one of the best in the world, however, to quote Victor Hugo “Being good is easy, what is difficult is being just.”

Worse yet the problems that we are facing today are not new ones. During his speech at the 1963 March on Washington, Dr. King said it far better than I ever could:

“In a sense we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring the sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check

which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’ But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity in this nation.

So, we have come to cash this check—a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.”

Like many of you, when I was child, I believed that that check would soon be cashed. I believed that we would be past moments like the crises that we are facing today. I believed that Dr. King’s dream would have been long since fulfilled. I believed that my two boys would be living in a nation where they would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I still believe in the promises of that dream even though they have been deferred. We must not let that dream “dry up like a raisin in the sun.” (*Harlem*, by Langston Hughes)

As I have publicly said before, we have come a long way, but there is still a long way to go. My life is bookended by the torture and killing of Emmett Till, and the election of America’s first Black president. We are a better country than we have ever been, but there is still a lot of work to do. Every one of us can make a difference in the fight to eradicate racial injustice. Robert F. Kennedy once said, “Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped.

Each time [someone] stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, [they send] forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Many of you have heard me talk about race, implicit bias and my own life experiences facing these issues. Many of you have attended Judicial Branch trainings and programs that were designed to help us deal with these issues in our own lives and in order to fulfill the mission of the Branch to serve the interests of justice and the public by resolving matters brought before it in a fair, timely, efficient and open manner.

I am proud of the work that we have started, but there is so much more to do. I know that I am asking a lot of you. I know that you are tired, you are weary and maybe even rightfully disillusioned, but this is a battle for the nation’s soul. We must double and even triple our efforts to provide equal justice for all those whom we serve. We have but two choices: to keep working hard and succeed; or to quit and fail. As for me, the latter is not an option.

As President Barack Obama once said: “Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson