



Friday, November 21, 2014

Dear Governor Nixon:

As national civil and human rights organizations and leaders committed to the protection of the rights of African Americans and all Americans, we come together as we did in the immediate aftermath of Michael Brown's death to urge you to respect the rights of the all of the residents in Ferguson. While we all await the decision of the grand jury impaneled to decide whether or not to indict Michael Brown's killer, Officer Darren Wilson, and as we all continue to mourn the loss of Michael Brown and all of the unarmed people of color who are killed daily on our streets, we urge you to exercise responsible and thoughtful judgment that would not allow the people of Ferguson to once again be victimized by those put in office to serve and protect them.

Despite your premature declaration of a state of emergency and activation of the National Guard, we hope that you send a strong message to the residents of Ferguson and the surrounding area that they will not be treated as second class citizens, subjected to unnecessary, militaristic, and overly aggressive policing tactics of the sort many feel contributed to Michael Brown's killing. Additionally, we urge you to reassure all residents that while law enforcement will serve to protect everyone's safety, it will simultaneously uphold the constitutional rights to free speech and assembly of residents and any others who have chosen to exercise that sacred right.

Once again, the whole world will be watching Ferguson. It is imperative that the militarized and abusive police tactics deployed against peaceful protestors and witnessed worldwide are not repeated. All steps must be taken to ensure that our citizens' constitutional right to protest is protected, and that no one is subjected to abuse, harassment, or punishment for having chosen to exercise that sacred right. We are all beneficiaries of those like Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez, Dorothy Height and countless others who exercised their constitutional rights to free speech and freedom of assembly and changed our country for the better by forcing it to live up to its creed of "equal opportunity for all."

As representatives of the larger civil and human rights community, we stand in solidarity with young leaders like Jerika Taylor, Antoine White otherwise known as "T-Dubb," clergy and the many others on the ground who are working every day to achieve progress in Ferguson. While Michael Brown's killing has highlighted the ongoing racial tensions in Ferguson and other similarly situated communities, as well as the ongoing structural barriers that limit opportunities for African Americans, we know that this is a long term struggle for social and economic equality. Thus, we expect there to be continued protests and calls for change by residents and we will support them in these efforts.

Additionally, while we truly appreciate and support the ongoing discussions to negotiate principles of engagement by law enforcement with the community, we cannot ignore the fact that there remains a continued mistrust and concern of law enforcement by many in the Ferguson community. This is why it is particularly important to develop better cooperation and relationships amongst residents, law enforcement and elected officials to effectively confront the challenges in Ferguson and the greater St. Louis community. These problems will not be resolved overnight, but they can and will be if your administration, law enforcement and the community work together to address the systemic problems that African Americans are facing in your state. While we hope for the best, all of our organizations will continue to monitor the situation in Ferguson and other cities and take necessary actions to uphold our laws and fight for justice for all.

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

- Barbara Arnwine, President and Executive Director
- Tanya Clay House, Public Policy Director

A. Phillip Randolph Institute

- Clayola Brown, President

Advancement Project

- Judith Browne Dianis, Co-Director
- Shuya Ohno, Project Director

African American Policy Forum

- Kimberle Crenshaw, Executive Director

American Civil Liberties Union

- Laura Murphy, Director of the Washington Legislative Office
- Dennis Parker, Director of our Racial Justice Program

Empowerment Temple AME Church

- Pastor Jamal Bryant

Hip Hop Caucus

- Reverend Lennox Yearwood, President and CEO

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

- Wade Henderson, President and CEO
- Nancy Zirkin, Executive Vice President
- Lisa Bornstein, Legal Director

Muslim Advocates

- Farhana Khera, President and Executive Director

NAACP

- Cornell Williams Brooks, President and CEO

NAACP-Legal Defense Fund

- Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel
- Janai Nelson, Associate Director-Counsel
- Leslie Proll, Director, Washington DC Office
- Vincent Southerland, Senior Counsel, Criminal Justice Project

National Bar Association

- Pamela Meanes, President

National Coalition on Black Civic Participation

- Melanie Campbell, President and CEO, Convener of Black Women's Roundtable

PICO National Network

- Rev. Michael McBride, Director of Urban Strategies and Lifelines to Healing Campaign

Rainbow Push Coalition

- Reverend Jesse Jackson, Jr.