Statement of Solidarity on the Movement for Black Lives

“And so in a real sense, our nation’s summers of riots are caused by our nation’s winters of delay.” - Martin Luther King Jr.

Ahmaud Arbery. Sean Reed. Breonna Taylor. George Floyd. Tony McDade. David McAtee. And countless other names. The outrage that this country is experiencing did not happen in a vacuum. State-sanctioned violence has been a substantial part of the Black experience since the first enslaved Africans were brought to this country. We, as Black Americans, are uniquely familiar with the daily racism and violence that has been perpetrated by this country. Black Americans are two-and-a-half times more likely to be shot by police than White Americans.

Police officers are not above the law. It is our job, as a society, to hold these men and women accountable for their actions. As Black law students, we recognize our responsibility to not only speak up about these issues but to support the organizations that are leading the movement. We stand in solidarity with all of the protesters who are a part of this movement and are putting their bodies on the line to enact change. Sometimes peaceful means are needed. Other times there needs to be civil unrest. We support both. We do not support those who are using this moment for their separate political gain and to deflect from the message. The anger goes further than just the names that are listed above. There have been countless people, known and unknown, whose lives have been prematurely taken by police, and we cannot allow their deaths to be in vain.

Author and Civil Rights activist James Baldwin said,

“[w]hat is it that you wanted me to reconcile myself to? I was born here more than 60 years ago. I’m not going to live another 60 years. You always told me ‘it takes time’. It’s taken my father’s time, my mother’s time, my uncle’s time, my brothers’ and my sisters’ time, my nieces’ and nephews’ time. How much time do you want for your progress?”

That was over 30 years ago, and here we are today, in 2020, fighting the same fight. “How much more time do you want for your progress?” - James Baldwin

We demand change throughout the criminal justice system. This change should focus on implicit bias, inadequate training, criminalization based on race, police oversight boards, and over policing of Black neighborhoods. We demand that ALL of the officers involved be arrested and punished accordingly. Black Lives Matter today, tomorrow and always.

In Unity and Solidarity,

Marilyn Yarbrough Chapter of the Black Law Students Association at the University of Tennessee College of Law