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Statement from President Karol V. Mason During this Time of Unrest

I am distraught to see George Floyd so senselessly killed at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. I am so saddened to see the justified outrage at the unjustified killing of another Black person now being used by a few to disrupt peaceful protests. Their destructive actions are impacting our communities of color at a time when they are already suffering disproportionately from the insidious novel coronavirus and a long history of racism and inequality.

I know that many of you were hurt waiting for me to speak out publicly as the President of John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Thank you for understanding that like you, I am in pain and needed time on a personal level to process my own pain before being in a position to speak as the President of our institution.

I know the specific struggles people of color face on a daily basis. Listening to our Black and Latinx students, I know that many of them have themselves experienced aggressive law enforcement tactics in the communities they call home. Having designed initiatives during my time at the Department of Justice expressly intended to prevent this type of inexcusable tragedy, I'm outraged that this has happened again. At the same time, I'm immensely proud of our students, alumni, and partners working in law enforcement agencies. I've worked closely with these courageous men and women, and I know that they strive to protect our communities with compassion and respect.

In the wake of George Floyd's death, I have struggled to reconcile these aspects of my life. I have struggled to find the words to express my personal pain, my concern for our students' safety, and my resolve to ensure that at John Jay, we live up to our responsibility to educate police officers to be better partners with the communities they serve.

Our students, our fierce advocates for justice, put out a "[Statement Regarding Racial Injustice Amidst COVID-19 Global Pandemic Across the Nation and New York City](#)," and a "[Statement Regarding the Silence of President Karol V. Mason on Black Issues](#)." I recommend we all read these thoughtful and powerful statements that provide concrete suggestions to guide our response to the chaos now consuming our country. Our students challenge us to make sure that we are educating a generation of law enforcement officers to police with the support of and respect for the communities they serve, with the moral and ethical leadership to speak up when a fellow officer does not respect the sanctity of another's life.

The majority of police officers in this country wear the badge because they want to protect and serve. Our job at John Jay is to equip the next generation of officers with the tools to partner with the communities they serve, to understand the painful legacies of how under the color of

law, many of these communities were harmed and not protected by those sworn to protect them. To give them the tools to recognize how to de-escalate a situation, whether it's a situation being escalated by a member of the community, or one of their fellow officers. Our job is also to equip the next generation of advocates to hold our law enforcement leaders accountable when necessary.

Tonight, I pray for peace. But as I look ahead, I know that John Jay is the one place where we can do the difficult job of reconciling differing positions and show how the country should respond to prevent this from ever happening again. We need to engage in public conversations with the faculty educating our future law enforcement officers and leaders, our students who are our fierce advocates for justice, our alumni in uniform, and our alumni protesting the police, to design a path forward. We must take a deep look at whether we are teaching our students, including our future law enforcement officers, the skills they need to lead and contribute to creating a more just and fair society. We must use the experts in our own faculty to ensure that our faculty, staff and students are trained to understand the history of racism in this country, and how it continues to impact every aspect of our society.

Over the next few weeks, we will have an open John Jay forum to provide an opportunity for our community to express their thoughts, their anger, and, hopefully, ideas for moving the country and our community forward. This summer, we will also convene a panel discussion with faculty, current students, law enforcement leaders, community advocates, and alumni in uniform, to examine how we should be educating our future leaders, educators, public servants, and law enforcement officers.

It is incumbent upon all of us to birth a new and fairer justice system. Those who are protesting deserve to be heard. I commit to do this hard work with you.