



Amara Statement on Chauvin Verdict

Our Commitment to Champion Racial Justice and Police and Criminal Justice Reform



While we joined with others in celebrating the judicial victory on Tuesday of “guilty on all three counts” for Derek Chauvin, the former White police officer who lynched an African-American man, George P. Floyd, we knew that this was the beginning and not the end. We, at the [Amara Legal Center](#), celebrate the life of George P. Floyd, and we lift up his family with gratitude for their unwavering resilience. We also reaffirm our commitment to fighting for racial justice, police reform, and criminal justice reform.

Tuesday’s verdict will be sealed in the history books. The nation, and in fact the world, witnessed the U.S. criminal legal system hold Chauvin accountable for murder. He could face up to 75 years in prison. There is vindication in this verdict, however, there is also the reality of how broken the criminal legal system is and how much needs to be done to reimagine police departments across the country. The mere fact that we all had to sit on the edge of our seats, waiting anxiously for this verdict, when we bore witness through video footage of the wanton police brutality committed by Chauvin, is in itself a declaration of a dire need to truly address systemic racism, in all its forms.

Chauvin wielded his power and authority as law enforcement to abuse citizens. He had 18 complaints, allegations of misconduct and excessive force in 19 years. Chauvin is just one officer, and we know that the majority of police officers are dedicated public servants who want to serve and protect our communities. However, time and time again, we see the tell-tale signs of police departments desperately in need of reform. At Amara, we hear first-hand from our clients about their experience with some police officers. Amara’s clients are survivors of sex trafficking or individuals who have been harmed by the commercial sex industry. They are predominantly African-American, U.S.-born cis- and trans-women between the ages of 13 and 29, who often times face re-victimization at the hands of the legal system and law enforcement.

Many report their fear of calling the police to help escape their traffickers or to prosecute them because they are not believed or they are seen as criminals first or they face sexual harassment from officers. Our clients tell us that they will not make a formal complaint against police officers who have harassed them for fear of retribution. A significant portion of our

clients also face incarceration during their exploitation and are not identified as victims by police. Our law enforcement and judicial systems saddle them with criminal records that exacerbate their vulnerability to exploitation and re-traumatizes them.

Amara works to address this by advocating for a more equitable legal system by practicing our work with a focus on racial justice to support marginalized populations struggling for equity and safety. By providing free, [trauma-informed legal representation](#), access to support services, training opportunities, and advocacy for sound [public policy](#), we strive to level the legal playing field for individuals impacted by sex trafficking or involved in commercial sex work in the DC-metro area. With access to free legal help, our clients have the ability to stop the civil and human rights abuses they have suffered, using the law as a tool to advocate for their rights.

Our trainings focus on human trafficking, sex trafficking, and trauma-informed legal representation to help inform and educate law enforcement (police, attorneys, courts, etc.), community-based organizations, and social service organizations. These trainings help to break down myths and barriers that prevent our clients and other victims of crime from receiving appropriate client-centered support services and care. We will continue to be proactive in connecting with police departments in the DMV area to provide them with training opportunities that assist them in seeing the survivor as an individual in need of support, not as a criminal. We will continue to push for police reform.

Amara also advocates for state and local public policies rooted in police and criminal justice reform, such as diversion and alternative programs for incarceration, accountability and transparency, and expungements, along with record sealing for victim-defendants. Amara knows how valuable the law can be to restorative justice. We are keenly aware that justice spans beyond the courtrooms to national social policy issues such as equitable access to housing, employment, education, and healthcare. Our clients face poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, substance abuse, and incarceration during their exploitation. We work to partner with social service organizations to provide referrals to meet the complex needs of our clients.

Yes, Tuesday marked a good day in America's history, with one step forward to justice. This week is National Crime Victims' Rights Week, and the many Black and Brown individuals facing injustice need our collective voices and actions to dismantle systemic racism and build equal protections under the law. Amara stands in solidarity with our partners and other advocates to continue to champion racial justice and to advocate for police and criminal justice reform and the rights of all people to live self-determined lives.

How can you help? Contact Amara to be a [volunteer](#), [refer someone](#) to us you think could benefit from our services, reach out to us about our [training opportunities](#), support our work by [becoming a monthly donor](#), and join us in our advocacy work to push for policies that promote equal justice. We welcome your assistance!

As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

In Solidarity,

Carole Bernard
Executive Director



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