

A Message from President John Thrasher

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Dear FSU Family,

I know this has been a difficult week. Like you, I am deeply disturbed about the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and I strongly condemn the police conduct we witnessed. It is everyone's responsibility to stand up against abuse of power, and we must hold these officers accountable. I pray that the circumstances surrounding Floyd's death are thoroughly investigated and that justice is served.

I know many students and others in the Florida State University community are rightfully angry and upset about Floyd's death and other incidents of racial violence taking place across the country. We have no tolerance for racism or discrimination on our campus, and we stand together and are here to support all members of our community. I encourage students to visit <https://studentaffairs.fsu.edu/virtualfsu> for a list of resources and opportunities to engage in conversation and events.

It is important during these tumultuous times that we reaffirm the values that we, as a university, hold most dear — respect, civility, and diversity and inclusion — as well as our commitment to justice and equality.

FSU Police Chief Terri Brown and our exceptional FSU Police Department take to heart their oath to protect and serve — and that means treating every member of our university family with dignity and respect and ensuring that everyone feels safe and at home on our campus.

Sincerely,

President John Thrasher

A Message from the FSU College of Social Work

The community at the FSU College of Social Work is alarmed and saddened by the escalating violence careening across our country, triggered by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. We join FSU President Thrasher's **strong condemnation** of this police action.

Closer to home, recent police shootings in Tallahassee are being presented to the grand jury, and the community has rightfully demanded transparency in these procedures to ensure that justice will be served. How terrible it is when the very civil institutions that are designed to promote social order *and* to preserve human rights begin to break down. In addition to the traumatic outcomes for victims and their families and friends, systemic and racist-driven violence destroys the mutual trust and social solidarity required for living as a thriving community.

As professional social workers, we are committed to fighting injustice, institutional and interpersonal violence, and all forms of ideology and attitude that target people because of their social class, race, creed, gender, and sexual identity and orientation. We vigorously oppose all attempts to humiliate and discriminate against human beings because they belong to a certain class of persons that violent people seek to target and harm. No one has the right or privilege to deem some people as less worthy of basic respect and dignity; no one has the right to strip any other person of their human rights and civil rights.

Indeed, the leadership of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Major Cities Chiefs Association stated, "Law enforcement officers are trained to treat all individuals, whether they are a complainant, suspect, or defendant, with dignity and respect. This is the bedrock principle behind the concepts of procedural justice and police legitimacy." We know these core values are also embraced by thousands of social workers that work with police departments and as law enforcement, criminal justice, and public safety professionals across the nation. We need to harness this progressive energy that is alive in so many law enforcement jurisdictions.

Criminal justice systems across America require massive reform. America incarcerates more people than any other country on the globe, and this has created a destructive system that daily renders unjust outcomes. African American and other minority families and communities in this nation have been decimated by decades of mass incarceration policies and their traumatic effects. Disproportionate incarceration of African American men has poisoned criminal justice processes. The profession recognizes that this cumulative,

historical, and traumatic stress is the context for the current responses of aggrieved communities, and indeed, has identified significant criminal justice reform as a “**grand challenge**” for social work and American society.

How can we respond?

We are especially grateful that our College of Social Work students, faculty, and staff work each day to promote the diversity in relationship, thought, and action with which we strive to animate our educational, research, and service missions. We are very grateful to our alumni and supporters who work each day to promote human rights, fairness, and institutional equity, and also support our work with their advice, mentoring, and investments.

More specifically, it is *crucial* to understand that Florida State University and the College are actively engaged in criminal justice policy reform through the leadership of the **Institute for Justice Research & Development (ijrd.csw.fsu.edu)**. The IJRD significantly engages formerly incarcerated persons, police, prosecutors, public defenders, governors, legislators, federal officials, advocates, and other key players in justice systems to collaborate on science-driven policy reforms. IJRD is leading the way in using evidence-based approaches to criminal justice reform; their innovative programs and interventions strive to help persons, families, and communities heal and thrive. I urge you to learn more about this important nationwide work.

In addition, the **Florida Institute for Child Welfare (ficw.fsu.edu)** has actively taken on the problem of racial disparities in child welfare. African American children are more likely than White children to be removed from their families when assessed as “at risk” of harm and abuse. Since removal and placement in foster care and other out of home settings have frequently been the precursors to crossing over into the juvenile and adult justice systems, addressing racial disparities is crucial to preventing the next generation from going to prison, rather than attending college.

We live in an imperfect world, and as human beings we all too often fall short of our ideals in the classroom and in the field. But as social workers, even as we sometimes fail, we take up that charge-- head-on-- to do better, to learn from error, to employ our analytic and moral intelligence in order to act more justly, ethically, and effectively in our work. That is the mission of our profession and that of higher education—to think and reason, to employ science for the common good, to connect with each other, to enact hope, trust, compassion, intelligence, and democratic values even when threatened by despair, violence, ignorance, and the abuse of power.

This commitment to compassion and justice can feel very overwhelming. In addition, the pandemic has challenged all of us with another insidious level of stress, even as we incur the emotional toll of the work toward justice that we “usually” perform. We say to all of our colleagues--and especially to our students, faculty, staff, and alumni of color-- that we see you, we stand with you, and we will work together in the days ahead. We urge any of our FSU and College family that are facing distress to utilize another of our programs, the **FSU Student Resilience Project (strong.fsu.edu)** that is designed to help us deal with crisis,

stress, and adversity. During these dark times, striving for resilience can help us serve others with compassion, empathy, and perseverance.

And a special message to our students:

Please know that faculty and staff are here to support you; reach out to us. We have deeply appreciated your emails and calls during this difficult time. Please look into the initiatives mentioned above, but also the work across the entire College, for opportunities to get involved in the sustained commitment to social reform.

In closing, let us reflect together on Dr. King's *resilient* integration of moral humility, resoluteness, and hope in words spoken during another period of extraordinary violence and confusion: "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice." It means a lot that another great Civil Rights leader, **Congressman John Lewis**, reminded us a few days ago that we need to focus on this positive vision of America.

Let us strive together as students, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends and supporters of this College to continue to envision and bring about that hopeful and redemptive vision of America!

Jim Clark
Dean & Professor