STATE BAR ASSOCIATION CREATES TASK FORCE ON RACIAL JUSTICE IN RESPONSE TO GEORGE FLOYD’S DEATH

New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) President Scott M. Karson today, issued the following statement:

George Floyd’s death at the hands of law enforcement and its aftermath were not aberrations; they were the culmination of a long history of racism and inequality that continues to plague our nation. It is now up to us, as a society, to seize this important moment and make sense of what must come next. The death of George Floyd is a call for bold action, including institutional and cultural reform — in law enforcement, as well as within the broader criminal justice system.

While the vast majority of police officers are dedicated and honorable public servants, the repeated incidents of police brutality demonstrate that there is a far-reaching problem that must be addressed. The status quo is plainly unsustainable. Police violence against people of color is just a symptom of the broader and more complex deep-seated racial disparities within our criminal justice system that undermine the rule of law. Meaningful change will thus require much more than addressing the issue of police brutality but instead rethinking all aspects of our justice system — from arrest to sentencing and incarceration.

In light of the death of George Floyd while in police custody, NYSBA intends to form a task force to analyze the criminal justice system and to recommend meaningful reforms intended to eliminate the scourges of racism and disparate treatment of our citizens.

The task force will recommend ways to achieve the following needed reforms with respect to police misconduct:

- There must be greater transparency and better accountability within the police force itself through the use of body cameras and other data-gathering techniques, better and more rigorous training, and the sharing of information about internal investigations and instances of misconduct.
- The oversight of police conduct should be more inclusive. In particular, there should be greater civilian participation in the review of police conduct.
• When laws are broken, prosecutors must investigate and respond to police misconduct swiftly, transparently, and fairly — as with any other crime.

NYSBA welcomes the opportunity to be an active and positive force for reform, and we look forward to working with New York state and local officials to effect the kind of robust and meaningful change that is needed to restore faith in our criminal justice system.

NYSBA Committee on Diversity and Inclusion Co-chairs Mirna Santiago and Violet Samuels today also issued the following statement:

The waves of protests across the country represent society’s frustration with repeated incidents of police brutality and a corresponding failure to institute reform to stop them. This failure runs deeper than the incidents themselves and speaks to a failure of the criminal justice system in the United States.

About the New York State Bar Association
The New York State Bar Association is the largest voluntary state bar association in the nation. Since 1876, the Association has helped shape the development of law, educated and informed the legal profession and the public, and championed the rights of New Yorkers through advocacy and guidance in our communities.

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