



North Carolina Legislative Black Caucus

Rep. Kelly Alexander, Chair
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April 23, 2021,

Mr. James O'Neill, President
Mr. Ernest Lee, Vice President
North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys
901 Corporate Center Dr.
Raleigh, NC 27607

Re: Legislative Black Caucus Concerns with Conference Priorities

Dear Mr. O'Neill and Mr. Lee:

The North Carolina Legislative Black Caucus is writing to you today to express our deep concerns with the priorities and actions of the NC Conference of District Attorneys ("the Conference") in the General Assembly. As you know, our 42 caucus members represent diverse districts across the state, covering dozens of counties in rural, urban, and suburban areas. We recognize and support the need for a well-run criminal legal system, and we appreciate the dedication to public service demonstrated by your members. However, we also recognize that mass incarceration and racial inequities in our criminal legal system are harming real people and families everyday and otherwise tearing at the fabric of our communities.

In both its statements and actions, the Conference has failed to take seriously the urgent calls for reform in North Carolina's justice system; instead, the Conference--on behalf of its member district attorneys--has doubled down in support of a broad range of unnecessary policies and practices that disproportionately harm people of color. Our members call on you to make good on your members' commitments to serve justice in our state, and remedy this tragic and severely consequential misalignment.

The Conference's January 2021 [Report on Race, Equity, and Criminal Justice](#) states that the Conference's members "work to seek justice and protect our communities." However, even in that report, the Conference failed to directly confront what the facts clearly show: inequities in the criminal justice system are not merely "perceived"—they exist in the hard numbers and in the blood and tears of our Black and Brown

communities. This is 2021, and it is no longer acceptable to suggest that these stark realities may not be the truth.

Furthermore, the Conference's priorities and actions in the General Assembly this legislative session demonstrate an disregard for racial equity. We have seen no evidence of the Conference supporting even its own minimal recommendations such as misdemeanor first appearances (what is this?), eliminating \$1000 secured bond for failures to appear, or funding for mental health and drug treatment.

We remain especially disappointed the Conference's efforts to lobbying against parole for juveniles sentenced to life in prison. Today, 90.5 percent of children ,who are sentenced to life without parole in North Carolina, are children of color. Moreover, recent data shows that while 26% of the state's 13-17 year olds are Black, more than 80% of those serving life sentences for crimes committed as juveniles are Black. The United States remains the only country in the world that punishes children with life without parole (mentions U.S. – have other states given parole for children serving life sentences). Every person deserves to seek redemption while in prison. Eliminating juvenile life without parole is a strong first step toward racial equity.

We believe victims of serious crime and their families deserve care, safety, and support. However, supporting victims' rights and racial equity in the criminal justice system is not a tradeoff. But that is not a tradeoff that we have to make.

If the Conference fails to meet the goals set out in 2021 Report on Race, Equity, and Criminal Justice, it will no longer find partners in the Legislative Black Caucus. We would welcome an honest and open-minded dialogue with the Conference about these issues. We look forward to hearing from you.

Rep. Kelly Alexander, Chair

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