June 17, 2020

Dear Members of the Snohomish County Legal Community,

Our country is still plagued by the scourge of racism and people of color continue to suffer from a system that devalues and degrades their lives. Today, we answer the call from the Washington State Supreme Court to join them in an historic effort to eradicate racism in all its forms and wherever found within our system of justice. We echo the words of our highest court in acknowledging the painful fact that for centuries, Black Americans have struggled to enjoy the rights promised to all Americans by our Constitution and, instead, have continued to face the horrors of racism and brutality.

We see plainly the overrepresentation of Black Americans in the criminal justice system. We must recognize that responsibility for these wrongs belongs to all of us and that our courts have contributed to the systemic racism that exists in our communities. We agree with the Washington State Supreme Court’s observation that legal professionals, lawyers and judges alike, bear responsibility for ensuring that systemic racism and discrimination is eradicated in all its insidious forms. We hereby dedicate ourselves to being part of the solution.

The Snohomish County Superior Court Judicial Officers have been educated about the unconscious bias that can affect legal decision-making by judges and juries. We pledge to persistently search within ourselves to identify our implicit biases and to be vigilant in ensuring that these biases do not influence how we receive evidence or render decisions in individual cases that come before the court. We have put in place measures to share this training with each new juror and encourage them to also be aware of and guard against their own biases.

We know there is more work to be done. As a bench, we are committed to the principles of justice, fairness, and equality, and we will continue to strive to achieve those principles each day. Part of this means taking a hard look at our own institution and rooting out discriminatory practices where we find them, and diversifying our work force to better represent the community we serve. This also means taking a hard look at our individual actions every day in our interactions with co-workers and other members of our communities. Systemic racism does not exist in a vacuum, it is a product of our collective actions. We must continue to reflect on how our individual actions enable racial injustice and discrimination and consistently strive to live up to the principles of justice, fairness, and equality that we have sworn to uphold. We must make sure that our public condemnation of racism is not merely an act done to make us feel good about ourselves today, rather, our words must come from a place of real concern and a genuine desire to do and demand better. We call on the members of our own legal community to be vigilant and tireless in shining a light on discriminatory laws and practices and in working with us to end them.
Now is the time for all citizens to come together to work for change. As the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us, “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.” We join with the Justices of the Washington State Supreme Court to reaffirm our deepest level of commitment to achieving justice by ending racism.

Judge Anita L. Farris

Judge Eric Z. Lucas

Judge David A. Kurtz

Judge Bruce I. Weiss

Judge George F. B. Appel

Judge Joseph P. Wilson

Judge Richard T. Okrent

Judge Janice E. Ellis

Judge Marybeth Dingledy

Judge Millie M. Judge

Judge Cindy A. Larsen

Judge Jennifer R. Langbehn

Judge Paul W. Thompson

Judge Anna G. Alexander

Judge Edirin O. Okoloko

Commissioner Jacalyn A. Brudvik

Commissioner Tracy G. Waggoner

Commissioner Patrick M. Moriarty

Commissioner Susan E. Harness

Commissioner Patricia J. Nelson