



VIOLENCE FREE
MINNESOTA
THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

April 20, 2021

Dear Violence Free Minnesota members,

Today a jury found Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin guilty of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter for killing George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

Beyond today's verdict and what the criminal-legal system has deemed just, we grieve. George Floyd should still be here. Daunte Wright should still be here. Philando Castile, Jamar Clark, Nekeya Moody and thousands more killed by law enforcement should still be here.

We, like so many others, know that the deadly actions by law enforcement are not about "a few bad apples." We understand, after years of attempting to work with the criminal-legal system to end relationship abuse, that the entire tree is rotten, down to its roots in centuries of slavery, genocide, and white supremacy. Following the murder of George Floyd and 2020 Uprisings, Violence Free Minnesota issued a statement titled "Transforming Public Safety." In this statement, we accounted for decades of placing our movement's energy in solutions offered by the state and criminal-legal system, despite knowing:

- the criminal-legal system does not ensure safety for all victim/survivors, placing many at greater risk of harm;
- the criminal-legal system often re-traumatizes victim/survivors;
- victim/survivors are charged and convicted under this system for behaviors that were necessary for their survival and safety.

After forty years of investing time and energy to create safety solutions within the criminal-legal system, our statement concluded:

- incremental reforms have not closed racial disparities in housing, jobs, education, wealth, health or safety;
- focusing on institutional and systems advocacy to mitigate harms has not worked;
- we cannot continue to use a violent and oppressive system in response to violence rooted in oppression.

During Violence Free Minnesota's 2020 Annual Meeting, our three keynote speakers invited us to imagine the possibility of another world, where healing and accountability follow harm; a world in which our children move without fear but with boundless joy;



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a world where we no longer act from crisis but fulfill roles of mutual aid and creative community support. Keynote speaker adrienne maree brown encouraged us to start small. Violence Free Minnesota is comprised of over 90 programs that provide safety and support to victim/survivors in communities across Minnesota. While the coalition works to facilitate change on a statewide level, change must also happen on a local level, facilitated by each member program.

adrienne maree brown also said, “What you pay attention to, grows.” We as Minnesota’s coalition working to end relationship abuse, choose to return our attention to the commitments made in “Transforming Public Safety.” As Violence Free Minnesota takes the following steps to transform safety and care in Minnesota, we take these steps alongside you, our member programs. We turn our collective attention and energy towards:

- Joining Black, Indigenous, and advocates of color who continue forging paths away from reliance on the criminal-legal system to address violence and harm in our communities.
- Diverting primary responses and resources to domestic and sexual violence away from the criminal-legal system towards community-based responses, including reallocation of funding into community-based solutions while opposing the expansion of criminal-legal options.
- Reimagining advocacy by ensuring that all of our services start from the needs and experiences of the most marginalized victim/survivors in our communities.
- Supporting policies that decriminalize survival, address mandatory arrest policies, increase affordable housing, and improve safety and quality of life for all Minnesotans.

Violence Free Minnesota believes these priorities deserve our collective time, attention, and care. Collectively, Violence Free Minnesota trusts and follows the leadership of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. We pay attention to ensuring victim/survivors and advocates – especially those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color – have the support needed to heal and thrive. Our time and attention are dedicated to manifesting safety in both new and old ways, without further investment in the criminal-legal system. Out of our grief and in hope, we will grow a new world rooted in safety, healing, and community care. Together, we can create a violence free Minnesota.

In coalition,

Liz Richards, executive director