



## Maryland Counseling Association Statement of Solidarity

August 14, 2020

On behalf of the Maryland Counseling Association (MCA), we at the Advocacy committee, Human Rights committee, and Maryland Counselors for Social Justice (MCSJ) present this statement of solidarity in support of the National Action Network's (NAN) Commitment March: Get Your Knee Off Our Necks, being held on August 28, 2020 in Washington, D.C. This march is intentionally held on the 57th anniversary of the historic March on Washington, where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his prominent and powerful speech, "I Have a Dream," and will be adhering to COVID-19 safety precautions and protocol.

We believe that Black Lives Matter. As a diverse group of counselors, educators, coaches, and mental health professionals serving communities in Maryland and DC, we believe in advocating to eliminate racial and systemic injustices. We stand with the NAN to call for changes to policing and criminal justice. As professionals, we are appalled by the current policing and criminal justice practices overwhelmingly affecting Black individuals in this country, and we understand the severe and negative consequences these experiences can have on mental health and wellness.

When the police misuse authority and commit brutality on citizens, it breaks trust, inflicts trauma, increases anxiety and fear, and perpetuates racism and intolerance. These symptoms of unjust actions challenge communities, impose family stress, and present a variety of psychological dilemmas for individuals. We encourage policy makers and elected officials to work with the NAN, mental health professionals, professional organizations, and criminal justice reform organizations towards reform that will reflect equal treatment under the law, accountability, and justice.

African American, Black individuals, and communities of color endure harsher sentences, fines, and penalties in the current criminal justice system than other ethnic groups in America. This unfair treatment deteriorates mental and emotional wellness, which negatively affects physical wellness. The consequences have negative ripple effects on the communities, families, and individuals. We encourage elected officials and policy makers to utilize the expertise of the NAN, criminal justice organizations, and mental health professionals to create policies that protect citizens, promote humanity, provide accountability, and promulgate equality.

Additionally, we support the NAN's action plan to encourage Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to take a stand by making their voices heard in local, state, and national levels of policy and governing. In accordance with the NAN, we encourage Black and African American individuals to register to vote, apply for their mail-in/absentee ballots, or show up to vote on November 3rd at their nearest polling location, complete the US 2020 Census, and encourage their friends and loved ones to do the same.

The Maryland Counseling Association, the Advocacy committee, the Human Rights committee, and Maryland Counselors for Social Justice are marching with the NAN on August 28, 2020.  
#MCA4BlackLives #NonstopToNovember

*For more information about NAN's Commitment March: Get Your Knee off Our Necks, please visit:*

<https://nationalactionnetwork.net/commitment-march-get-your-knee-off-our-necks/>

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