

A Message From the Advocacy Institute Director

Dear Friends of the Advocacy Institute,

As Director, I am committed to establishing the Advocacy Institute as a nexus between the University at Buffalo School of Law and the communities it serves. I therefore feel compelled to offer some reflections on the horrifying events of the past weeks, and on the Advocacy Institute's mission and responsibilities in light of these events. The killing of George Floyd has put into sharp relief the systemic racism and cruelty that is endured by men and women of color. Each day, we bear witness to more inhumane acts of police brutality against black people, troubling acts of state-sponsored violence against protestors, and existential threats to the legal norms we cherish. These injustices, of course, are occurring amidst a pandemic that has been worsened by our weakened institutions, and is disproportionately taking the lives of African Americans.

Any expression of solidarity means little if it is uncoupled from a commitment to confront the threats that we, and especially our communities of color, currently face. We are committed to this task, and we are reflecting on how we can do more. As many of you know, our Innocence and Justice Project has launched an initiative to challenge the lengthy sentences of incarcerated survivors of domestic violence—sentences that are disproportionately imposed on men and especially women of color. We will continue to examine ways this project can work to address the constantly evolving harms that are being visited on the most vulnerable. And of course, our educators—including many of you—continue to provide advocacy training that inculcates a commitment to safeguarding the legal norms and institutions that are being threatened by many of our political leaders.

We are continuing to develop those parts of the Advocacy Institute that address the most urgent injustices of the day. At the same time, we understand that real advocacy requires working alongside others in our community to support those on the front lines. For example, you might consider supporting some of the community bail funds that are so essential to combating some of the worst injustices of our pretrial detention system—more information can be found [here](#). Or perhaps you have donated your time and talent—and, for some of you, even your careers—to help those who are under legal threat. And some of you are in a position to act as voices of conscience within those institutions that are currently so fragile. The Advocacy Institute is grateful to all of you for the roles you play, and will come to play, in these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Anthony O'Rourke
Director of the Advocacy Institute