



Spokane Regional Labor Council

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Statement of Solidarity with the Black American Community Black Lives Matter

We recognize structural racism exists throughout our society and community, including our labor community. The death of George Floyd at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis is one of the latest in a string of unnecessary deaths and unconscionable murders by those entrusted by the public to protect and serve. Police violence has led to unnecessary deaths and injuries in Spokane and Eastern Washington. It must stop.

Structural racism negatively impacts Black Americans and communities of color, including our labor community. The consequences create turmoil impacting the liberty and freedom of every citizen. The militarization of police forces as part of the “war against drugs” and the “war on crime” along with “Zero tolerance” policies, have not made communities safer, but instead have broken the trust in community policing, particularly generating suspicion and fear in Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

Labor has worked for generations to make gains for safety in the workplace. When working families cannot live without fear for themselves, their children, or other family members, it also impacts safety in the workplace. In Spokane, Black and Native Americans are disproportionately arrested, receive higher bail amounts, and are more likely to die in jail. Additionally, the worst pandemic we have faced in the last century is disproportionately affecting communities of color, in part due to real fear that wearing a mask in public will result in more immediate harm. Two pillars of Labor have called upon us to do this work. A. Philip Randolph said: “The essence of trade unionism is social uplift. The labor movement has been the haven for the dispossessed, the despised, the neglected, the downtrodden, the poor.” Mary Harris “Mother” Jones called upon us to “Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living.” An injustice to one is an injustice to all and in communities of color it is a matter of life and death.

We call for our elected officials and the agency leaders they have appointed and hired to have a full discussion with representatives of the Black, Indigenous, People of Color communities to create and present a plan for identifying and dismantling systemic racism in every office, starting with those that interact with the public. These systems were not built overnight and will take time to change, but a commitment to developing a clear path and establishing a timeline to meet specific goals should be the highest priority.

The Spokane Regional Labor Council will also do our part by looking inward at how we have perpetuated systemic racism in our own house. We will support the Washington State Labor Council’s Race and Labor initiatives, work with our affiliates, delegates, and community partners to continuously evolve our equity lens to guide our committee work, and include implicit bias training in future Rank & File classes. All candidates that wish to receive our endorsement will need to demonstrate an unequivocal commitment to racial and economic justice.

“We cannot forget that the March on Washington was about freedom, economic equity and good jobs. The intersection of human rights, civil rights and workers’ rights has always been a part of our struggles for independent power both here and abroad. We must continue to uplift those movements in an intersectional way to ensure we are able to win justice at the workplace and the ballot box to make a difference for those we serve.” James Settles Jr, UAW & NAACP, Robin Williams, UFCW & NAACP, Richard Womack Sr, AFL CIO & NAACP

Civil Rights and Labor – Two Movements, One Goal

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