

# Susman Godfrey Partners' Statement to Our Employees Regarding the Wanton Killing of George Floyd and the Ensuing Public Protests

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Those are the words of Medgar Evers, who was murdered fifty-seven years ago for pursuing racial equality and justice. Though our society has made important strides since 1963, the wanton killing of Houston-native George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers underscores the distance we must still travel to end systemic racism in our country. Our Constitution enshrines the idea of equal justice under law. The waves of peaceful protests across America in the past week show that the idea of equal justice continues to animate us and our fellow citizens.

The recent unjustified killings of Black and Brown people, including Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Oscar Grant, Botham Jean, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and Michael Brown, often by those charged to protect them, tragically demonstrate the everyday danger of being a person of color in America. This curse of unrepentant racism further erodes the trust our fellow citizens hold in fundamental notions that are supposed to lie at the core of our justice system.

As attorneys we are ambassadors for justice. We have taken an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. We are committed to fairness, equality, liberty and due process. Racism is antithetical to everything we stand for and everything we work to achieve.

From the founding of our firm we have emphatically believed that lawyers have an obligation to be active in their communities and engaged in the work of justice. This principle remains core to our firm today. Our firm routinely pursues pro bono work that touches issues of racial justice.

- Susman Godfrey led the fight in Houston to dismantle the unconstitutional system of money bail in misdemeanor cases, which disproportionately affected racial and ethnic minorities. We continue that fight now on felony bail issues in Houston and in Dallas.
- Susman Godfrey represented Death Row exoneree Anthony Graves in his successful effort to have the State of Texas permanently disbar the prosecutor who violated the Constitution in his prosecution of this innocent African American man.
- Susman Godfrey represented Death Row exoneree Dewayne Brown in his successful effort to be deemed "actually innocent" of the murder of which he was wrongly convicted. We now represent this innocent African American man in his statutory claim for compensation from the State of Texas.
- Susman Godfrey successfully defended New York University Law Review against claims that its diversity and inclusiveness initiatives violate federal bias law by favoring minority applicants and authors.

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- Susman Godfrey represented the City of Seattle in successfully defending the city's landmark \$15 per hour minimum wage law.
- Susman Godfrey and the Innocence Project successfully represented George Rodriguez by obtaining relief that vacated his wrongful conviction and securing a jury award against the City of Houston for violating his due process rights by using false DNA evidence.
- Susman Godfrey represented Death Row inmates seeking to force the State of Texas to release information about the chemicals it uses to inflict cruel and unusual punishment as part of executions.
- Susman Godfrey represented the City of Houston against an attempt to repeal Houston's Equal Rights Ordinance that prohibited discrimination based on sex, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, military status, religion, disability, genetic information and pregnancy.
- Susman Godfrey currently represents medically vulnerable inmates in the Dallas County Jail seeking to force the Dallas County Sheriff to take constitutionally and statutorily required steps to protect them from the spread of COVID-19.

But we will never rest on our laurels, and recent events demand that we act even more broadly. Motivated by the renewed discussion of racial injustice in our country, we are committed to do more. Specifically, the partners have committed to the following:

- Each December, our firm makes significant charitable donations to honor our clients and professional colleagues. This year, 100% of our donations will be made to organizations that work for racial justice, and they will be made in memory of George Floyd.
- Susman Godfrey will "double match" every dollar donated by a Susman Godfrey employee to a 501(c)(3) organization working for racial justice. If you donate \$1 to any such organization, we will give \$2 more. If you give \$500, we'll give \$1,000 more.
- We will encourage our lawyers to substantially increase their commitment to pro bono representation and urge them to do so on cases that implicate racial justice.
- We will take a hard look at our hiring and retention practices. Though we have a longstanding commitment to diversity, we know that we can and must do better at recruiting and retaining minority attorneys, paralegals, secretaries, and staff. As a start, we will expand by 100% our current Diversity Fellowship program for 1st year law students.
- We know that there is a lot we don't know. We are committed to better educating ourselves about systemic racism and how it affects our society and our profession. We will continue to make available and encourage all our partners and employees to attend workshops and seminars on systemic racism, conducted by organizations with genuine expertise.

Susman Godfrey's partners are among the most successful and privileged lawyers in this country. While we all worked very hard to get where we are, we recognize that many of us benefitted from (and some of us struggled to overcome) social institutions that have roots in racial injustice. We know that many of our employees have been profoundly impacted by racism and discrimination, and that the wanton killing of George Floyd and others like him evokes pain and despair. Because you are an essential part of our Susman Godfrey family, this deeply upsets us. We give you our promise that we will work to make Susman Godfrey and our communities better.