



City of Lima, Ohio

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David J. Berger, Mayor

Mayor Berger's Statement on Death of George Floyd and Ongoing Civil Unrest

June 3, 2020 -- Please attribute the following statement to Lima Mayor David Berger

I want to take a few moments to comment on the current circumstances facing our community and nation.

Over a week ago, America watched a white law enforcement officer hold his knee on the neck of George Floyd, a black man, for more than 8 minutes, killing him as he cried for his mother and repeatedly state that he could not breathe.

What we witnessed in the killing of George Floyd was a fatal injustice, and I express my deepest condolences to the Floyd Family and all who are grieving his death. George Floyd should not have died, and I support Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey in his call for swift justice and accountability.

But I do not believe that we can stop there as a community or a nation.

Mr. Floyd's death has created a righteous demand from across America and around the world for the elimination of racism. Over the past couple of days, we have heard echoing from the streets of downtown Lima statements such as "Black Lives Matter", and we cannot act as if those are just words on a T-shirt or chants to be performed in unison during a march.

As a white man, I cannot presume to know what it is like to walk in the shoes of Black Americans. But I would be no different than those three officers that watched the murder of George Floyd and did nothing, if I did not acknowledge the systemic racism and violence that got us here today. We would be inhumane if we ignored that people are living in pain and fear, and that Black Americans want the same thing as every American – to be treated fairly and with dignity, to receive fair and equal treatment under the law, and to live in a society that is equitable, inclusive, and just. That is the cry that has been spoken and must now be heard throughout the nation and our community.

I stand in solidarity with that cry and with those who choose to exercise their first amendment right to protest, and applaud Lima Police Chief Kevin Martin for his leadership to ensure dialogue with those who are protesting and the work of the officers of the Lima Police Department to keep everyone safe as they exercise their first amendment rights.

But we should not and we cannot stop there.

As your Mayor and as a fellow human being I cannot say that I have always gotten everything right when it came to race relations. But today I call upon our community to rise up and examine our individual and collective roles in systemic racism, and to declare with our actions that Black Lives Matter.

And I think right now we have some real and significant opportunities to do so.

Some weeks ago, the Lima African American Chamber of Commerce and the Millennial Action Pact publicly raised the issue of diversity and inclusion on local boards in Lima and Allen County. The city, along with a number of public and private boards received a survey about these efforts and we were all asked to seriously engage in working to increase representation and racial diversity. It is my understanding that only two entities, the City of Lima and the Family and Children's First Council completed the survey. The administration and City Council also conducted public meetings to discuss the make-up of the City's Boards and Commissions. The Administration has issued a public call for volunteers who would like to be considered for such Boards and we intend to submit a plan to City Council detailing how we intend to increase diversity on our boards in the near future.

I want to be clear: The City has acted and is acting. I am calling for all other local organizations to take seriously the request that has been made by the Lima African American Chamber of Commerce and the Millennial Action Pact to participate in their survey and to respond positively to their request to diversify the boards that govern local public and government service entities and non profits.

But we should not, and we cannot stop there.

Today, I am also calling for the creation of a metropolitan Human Relations Commission to enforce civil rights; administer community relations initiatives promoting and maintaining peace, goodwill and harmony; assist in reducing inter-group tensions, and ensure equality of treatment and opportunity to all who live, work, play, and gather in the City of Lima and the surrounding townships, cities, and villages throughout Allen County. We are a racially diverse city and county and we need a metropolitan wide institution to address these concerns.

But we should not, and we cannot stop there.

Several years ago, the Black Ministerial Alliance publicly called for local law enforcement to adopt body cameras. The Lima Police Department, with my full support and that of Lima City Council, created a community stakeholder committee that included African American community representatives, launched a thorough research and testing process for body camera technology, and adopted policies and procedures for the use of body cameras by LPD patrol officers. The city spent more than a half million dollars deploying this technology and it is now consistently used every day to protect citizens and police.

Today I am calling for the other law enforcement agencies doing business in Lima and Allen County to also adopt body camera technology for their agencies. This includes the Ohio

Highway Patrol, Allen County Sheriff's Department, hospitals and universities, and townships and villages.

But we cannot, and we should not stop there.

For years the City of Lima has struggled with diversifying our workforce. In recent years, due to some changes made in the Civil Services Rules which moved from a Rule of 3 to a Rule of 10, we have made significant progress in diversifying our non-safety service departments. In order to make further progress, I have publicly called for additional Civil Service rule changes that would put in place rules that would allow any and all candidates that pass the civil service test to be considered for employment.

I am once again now calling on the Civil Service Board and Lima City Council to enact such a rule and to do so expeditiously.

But we cannot, and we should not stop there.

I am also calling on all elected officials and public appointing authorities in Lima and Allen County to adopt policies and procedures that would diversify their office or department work forces to achieve the goal of reflecting the racial demographics of our community. I also believe that every public entity and office should adopt practices that will assure non-discriminatory employment practices with respect to LGBTQ persons.

What occurred in Minneapolis runs contrary to the very fabric of who we are as a people. It is an assault on our sense of justice, our sense of fairness, and our sense of humanity. Now more than ever, we should all take action against the casual taking of human life and say enough is enough.

Progress to create a just, fair, equitable society requires each and every one of us to remain vigilant, recognize injustices, and resolve to work towards the betterment of the system. It requires commitment in this moment and ongoing persistent commitment for as long as it takes.

We must not become complacent in our fight to eliminate racism. We must fight against it in our homes, in our schools, in our courts, in our workplaces, and in our metropolitan community. We must do so now and continue our efforts until we actually see the change that is being called for in our streets.

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