

## **FROM THE DESK OF**

*The Center for the Study of Black Life and the Law at Mitchell Hamline School of Law*

February 19, 2023

Rep. Ruth Richardson, District 52B  
403 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Richardson,

We write with urgency to implore the House and Senate to pass legislation addressing the epidemic of missing and murdered Black women and girls in Minnesota. While we are academics, advocates and concerned community members, we also write as Black people who are mothers, siblings and children of Black women, girls, non-Binary and transgender people. We are also allies concerned with the ways in which Black women and girls in particular have been rendered as afterthoughts in historic and ongoing conversations about public safety. Our message is clear: Black women and girls are members of the public and their safety matters. Every Black life matters, and it is the duty of our collective communities, our state agencies and bodies, to ensure that these lives are only protected but valued not only for their contributions to society, but by the mere fact that they exist. Put differently, to be a Minnesotan, to be present in our state, is to be entitled to the safety and privileges we have long seen as foundational to our daily lives.

The Center for the Study of Black Life and the Law, joined by the Native American Law and Sovereignty Institute, the Dispute Resolution Institute and the Institute to Transform Child Protection—all based at Mitchell Hamline School of Law—are proud to endorse and call for the creation of the Office for Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls. The facts undergirding this need, and the inventions this office would provide, are clear:

- Black women are nearly three times more likely to die of homicide than white women;
- missing persons cases involving Black women and girls stay open four times longer than their white peers; and

- while comprising only 7% of the state's population, 40% of domestic violence victims in Minnesota are Black women.
- Black people—like our Indigenous kin and other historically excluded and ignored people—need more media coverage, humane law enforcement responses, and dedicated resources to address these disparities.
- Root causes are important to understand, and we need resources for prevention and support.
- The office will have resources for cold cases, community outreach, research, and funding to envision and realize innovative community collaborations.

While these numbers are stark, they likely mask the depth and urgency of this crisis; as Black people are less likely to be reported missing or have positive relationships with the very authorities entrusted with protecting our lives. This crisis of trust, engagement and service must be rectified so our communities—Black, White, Indigenous, Asian, Latino/a—can have an equal and equitable share in making Minnesota a state that thrives with, for and through us all.

Additionally, we affirm the outcomes and support the recommendations of the Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls Task Force created during the 2021 Legislative Session. The task force examined: Systemic causes of violence against African American women and girls; appropriate methods of tracking and collecting data; policies, practices, and institutions that impact violence against African American women and girls; measures necessary to address and reduce violence against African American women and girls, and; measures necessary to help victims, their families, and their communities. The task force recommended:

- Establish a Missing and Murdered African American Women Office
- Create and Fund Specific Spaces & Resources to Serve Black Women & Girls
- Develop Culturally Appropriate, Anti-Racist Trainings, Professional Education
- Hire and Retain African American Staff
- Design and Support Better Coordination Across Agencies
- Make Emergency and Long-Term Housing Accessible and Affordable

We are committed to these findings, principles, recommendations, and outcomes. Most importantly, we are committed to the protection of and investment in the lives of Black women and girls across the state of Minnesota; wherever and whoever they may be. We urge

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<https://mitchellhamline.edu/black-life-and-law/>

you, your colleagues across the legislative bodies and the Governor to make this office and these outcomes a reality.

Sincerely,

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