



## STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

**SUPREME COURT**  
Licht Judicial Complex  
250 Benefit Street  
Providence, RI 02903

March 31, 2021

An open letter to the people of Rhode Island:

### THIS WE BELIEVE

On June 5, 2020, more than 10,000 Rhode Islanders of all ages, races, socioeconomic and religious backgrounds assembled on the State House steps engaged in a historic and peaceful protest of the spate of needless deaths of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement. More broadly, the protest was a passionate display of grief and anger, along with a unified call to end systemic racism and discrimination that continue to plague this nation.

Traditionally, the Judiciary by way of both custom and judicial canons reserves comment and will not make extra-judicial statements regarding civic engagement. But, recognizing that this is a moment of inflection for our state and the nation, it is imperative that we lift our voice and reaffirm our commitment to the just and equal treatment of every person who appears before us. We must not remain silent in the face of such an undeniable truth, lest we risk jeopardizing the very reason we have a voice at all.

From its founding, Rhode Island's story is a twin tale of courage and controversy. It is important that we celebrate the unique contribution that our state's founders played in infusing principles of religious freedom and separation of powers into the formation of our national identity. Championed since Rhode Island's founding in 1636, these principles were boldly codified and beautifully captured in both our state Constitution and the U.S. Constitution. However, it is equally important to recognize and acknowledge the unique and preeminent role that Rhode Island played in the devastating history of slavery in the United States. Our geographically stunning coastline served as a brutal vertex along the Triangle Trade route resulting in the amassing of tremendous wealth among prominent Rhode Island slavers and

unspeakable cruelty to those held in bondage. This nation’s “original sin” of slavery and its progeny, including racial discrimination and institutional racism, have roots in Rhode Island, and we are committed to confronting it within our judicial system.

We want to instill confidence in the Black, Latino, Latina, LGBTQ and all under-represented communities that Rhode Island’s courts are their courts, and we will fulfill our constitutional mandate that they receive equal treatment under the law.

We recognize that the pursuit of justice is not merely an aspirational concept or abstraction; it is a guiding imperative that we, as members of the Judiciary, are duty-bound to seek. This We Believe.

The Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Rhode Island Courts:

/s/ Paul A. Suttell  
Paul A. Suttell, Chief Justice  
Supreme Court

/s/ Melissa A. Long  
Melissa A. Long, Justice  
Supreme Court

/s/ Luis M. Matos  
Luis M. Matos, Associate Justice  
Superior Court

/s/ Lia N. Stuhlsatz  
Lia N. Stuhlsatz, Associate Justice  
Family Court

/s/ Edward H. Newman  
Edward H. Newman, Magistrate  
Family Court

/s/ Alberto Aponte Cardona  
Alberto Aponte Cardona, Magistrate  
Family Court

/s/ Pamela Woodcock Pfeiffer  
Pamela Woodcock Pfeiffer  
Associate Judge, District Court

/s Christopher Smith  
Christopher Smith, Associate Judge  
District Court

/s/ Melissa DuBose  
Melissa DuBose, Associate Judge  
District Court

/s/ Susan P. Fay  
Susan P. Fay, Associate Judge  
Workers’ Compensation Court

/s/ Keith A. Cardoza, Jr.  
Keith A. Cardoza, Jr., Associate Judge  
Workers' Compensation Court

/s/ Alan R. Goulart  
Alan R. Goulart, Magistrate  
Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal

/s/ Edward C. Clifton  
Edward C. Clifton  
Associate Justice (Retired)  
Superior Court

[Hear District Court Associate Judge Melissa DuBose recite this letter](#)

Special thanks to Providence resident Anthony Kenner for the original sound, audio recording and production.