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For Employees of Color Who Work in Family Courts:

An Advocacy Letter Template
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**Address to your organization:**

**(Start with a short summary on the history of youth justice, changes that have been made and what change you are working on)** The landscape of youth justice in the United States has long been transforming towards implementing evidence-based community oriented interventions to effectively meet the needs of youth. Recent changes in youth justice legislation reflect a shift in understanding that youth need to lead and be centered in their process towards thriving, fare far better when in community, and heal better in spaces of restoration. Our practice for example has been evolving to **[INSERT EXAMPLES OF ANY NEW CHANGES. Examples: trauma and resiliency initiatives, expansion of community partnerships, expansion of Diversion practice]**

**(What have you done for the youth that have been impacted by COVID-19 and/or talk about COVID-19 & YOUTHS)** We have helped to lay the foundation for the [insert organization] innovative responsiveness to the impact of COVID-19. As such, it is our responsibility to offer our expertise--lived, studied, and implemented-- to the leaders of this **[insert organization]**, in response to the calls for Justice across the country, an issue that is inextricably connected to the disparate impact of COVID-19. We are a team of employees of color who have come together to develop a proposal with recommendations on how to address our local communities about the issues inherently present today which mirror many of the issues present within our **[insert organization or department]**. We believe that by addressing these issues in our practice and the ways in which we engage with the community, we can also begin to restore relationships within our division.

**(Express the daily struggles and hardships as being a black person in communities and talk about what your organization does to help)** Our society is being traumatized by the systemic, institutional racism that pervades the structures that govern and rule our citizenry. Our Black neighbors live in fear every second of every day that their name will be the next that needs to be remembered. That their child may be the next Black community member murdered in the streets by people who swore to protect them. **[Insert organization or department]** employees as well as people of color, we bear a double burden of working within the very systems that perpetuate the history of structural inequality and violence in our communities. Inhabiting this precarious position between system actor and community member results in a feeling of complicity when watching brutality unfold in our communities, at the hands of law enforcement.

**(What organization should do during these times and give recommendations with valid reasoning behind it)**

As a **[insert department or organizational employees]**, we can take many standpoints. We have to take notice that our communities of color are hurting during these trying times. We must take note of and address several needs that not only affect our communities of color but the very employees of this agency. What we choose to do today will not only affect the youth we serve but their families and the communities they reside in, and every employee to touch that case.

We propose that **[ insert department or organization]** take a stance on the betterment of not just our practice and its employees, but also the communities we serve. Below we have listed several ways in which **[insert department or organization]** can address these matters. Please note that we are willing and able to form an advisory committee for policy development in direct response to this moment that centralizes our perspectives and experiences.

1. Issue a statement of acknowledgement and action.
2. Affirm **[insert department or organization]** commitment to support employees of color.
3. Create policies that prevent the criminalization of youth who are protesting. Change the narrative of prosecution and become more trauma informed during these strenuous times for respondents of color. Let us assess these cases during COVID and the implementation of curfew "case by case basis". Let us, as a division, work together to think of more compassionate ways to try and heal these young people. We can consider diverting more cases and providing more therapeutic alternatives, rather than immediately filing VOP's, or remand applications. This measure of good will and good faith will help promote a different perception of the prosecution’s office. [**Insert your organization or department]** would no longer then be seen as a punitive organization, we would be seen as an organization that is changing the punitive narrative. When assessing cases, we must consider why a youth is engaging in behavior, to understand behavior as communication. Youth who participate in these protests are communicating to us: they do not feel like their lives matter. We must respond to their call for us to do better, to implement the strategies we know support their communities so that they can thrive.
	1. The following are initial considerations when developing policies and responses:
		* “How will we handle cases for youth arrested for protest related reasons?”
		* Consider declining to prosecute all cases related to protest. Our communities are in pain and are trying to communicate their distrust of law enforcement systems. We are an extension of that system and have a responsibility to affirmatively take actions to respond to our community’s calls to do better. We then must consider the impact on our relationship with communities that prosecuting cases would have. We fear that it would facilitate further distrust.
		* Continue the expansion of the Diversion practice: Youth all over the nation are in despair and dealing with compounded issues of isolation and grief due to COVID-19 and now social injustice at the hands of law enforcement. The Nation is in an unprecedented time and our youth’s voices are lost but so profound. We are committed to nurturing and addressing the needs of the youth while considering public safety. With increases in arrests due to the devastating state of our nation, our office is doing its part to look at all matters connected to this issue with much attention and fairness. Our Community Coordinators are working with program providers to access their response to these current times while servicing our youth. Our staff is also staying connected to the communities we serve by attending community board meetings and forums to better understand their needs and issues while building strong relationships.
		* “How will we handle violation cases for youth who were arrested for protest related reasons?” (I.e. youth who violate curfew, youth who are arrested for stealing from stores that were already broken into, youth who are arrested for “looting”)
		* In what ways can we centralize the resiliency of youth channeling their frustration into action
	2. Decriminalize resisting arrest.
		* Youth are attempting to communicate currently, and evidence based research demonstrates, that youth-police interactions are incredibly stressful for youth. Applying a trauma informed lens recognizes that youth resisting arrest may be reacting out of trauma. Decriminalization could look like: (refusing to charge resisting arrest, excluding resisting arrest from risk assessment, excluding resisting arrest from disposition assessment, declining to prosecute resisting arrest charges on probation cases.)

**(Express how much this means to your organization)** While everyone is a valuable member of this division, there is an undeniable power dynamic in terms of who actually has the ability and privilege to enact changes in our practice. We are calling on you, as our leaders, to seize this unprecedented moment to move our practice in a direction that is cognizant of the experiences of people of color in dealing with a storied legacy of marginalization and structural violence. That means not only restructuring the ways in which we interact with the communities that we serve, but also validating the experiences of people of color within our own Law Department community. We have taken this moment to step into our power, to be the change we wish to see. We are looking to our leaders who are positioned to facilitate change, to step into your power and guide our division to our goal of Justice for all.