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For Immediate Release

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STATEMENT BY SAN DIEGO COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY SUMMER STEPHAN

As the nation and San Diego County grapples with the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer, the events of the past several days have resulted in a mix of emotions and reactions. For many, it understandably ignited long-term, historic trauma that has its roots in racism and inequality. It is heartbreaking to watch the dehumanizing of Mr. Floyd's life and our condolences go out to his family. My heart aches over the suffering he endured.

It's clear that while this is a time to grieve, it is even more so a time to double down on our commitment to act in a manner that honors our values and our common humanity, and to forge permanent solutions. We in the San Diego County District Attorney's Office stand in solidarity with our communities to condemn racism and bigotry wherever it exists, in any form, in any uniform, by any perpetrator.

Our DA family is one with the communities we serve, and we will stand by the residents of San Diego County and fight alongside you to continue to pursue equality and fairness. The truth that all human beings are created equal and their lives are equally valuable should be self-evident but we need to acknowledge that even in 2020, those ideals are clearly not a reality for everyone.

In my office, there is nothing more central to our responsibility to protect public safety than the sanctity of human life, and our duty to stand with the voiceless in the pursuit of justice. Everyone must be held accountable under the law including prosecutors and police officers. I recognize that those of us who are leaders in the law enforcement community have the profound duty and responsibility to use our power to dismantle generations of inequity and to, with courage, continue to build systems of justice that represent a new way forward.

As a first step, I'm committed to working with our law enforcement leaders to increase transparency and support a culture in police departments of reporting bad actors. I view this issue as being similar to the duty of teachers and counselors as mandated reporters. They are not allowed to look away from abuse and neither should we in law enforcement be allowed to look the other way. There are many good, decent peace officers who are horrified by bad actors and how they destroy and cheapen the sacrifice of life and limb of all officers who put themselves in harm's way to protect us.

I'm also committed to forging ahead to train and retrain every officer in de-escalation methods that honor life and can protect those with mental health issues and disabilities during interactions with police. My office is coordinating this training, which includes elimination of racial bias, with the

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Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT) and the commitment and partnership from every Chief of Police and Sheriff in San Diego County. We are well on our way having trained 700 local officers with training of all 5,000 officers as the goal.

These are first steps that just scratch the surface of what we're up against, but we must make room for hope. Here in San Diego and across the country, law enforcement has denounced what happened and has vowed to do better.

Finally, peaceful protest is a time-honored tradition in our country, and we in law enforcement strive to protect these important First Amendment rights. The majority of those protesting are doing so peacefully. But when protests turn violent, it is an insult to the rightful expressions of peaceful protesters, and law enforcement must act to protect the community.

Protesting is an inalienable right recognized by the U.S. Constitution. Rioting is a crime.

As District Attorney, it is my responsibility to prosecute those who choose violence, looting or lawlessness to harm our community. I join San Diego's law enforcement and community leaders in calling for unity and peace, not violence and chaos, while we work together.

Now more than ever, the District Attorney's Office embraces our mission to pursue fair and equal justice for all. We must continue to call out injustice and fervently safeguard the sacred rights and dignity of all human beings. We take comfort in knowing there is much more good in the world than bad and we strive to be an integral part of that public good.