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2023 Executive Board

April 18, 2023

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## An Open Letter to the Kansas City Law Enforcement Agencies,

Upon learning of the depraved shooting of Ralph Yarl, by Andrew D. Lester, the Jackson County Bar Association is in a word: infuriated. Infuriated, that Black Americans continue to be harmed by the hands of those who do not value Black lives and the systems that protect reckless violence against Black people. The JCBA was founded to work to ensure justice and equal opportunity for the African-American community; improve the administration of justice; preserve the independence of the judiciary, improve the economic conditions of all citizens of Missouri; uphold the honor of the legal profession; and **protect the civil and political rights of the citizens and residents of the State of Missouri.** Nationally, we continue to witness countless Black Americans violently brutalized and killed without any justification, lest we forget the death of Trayvon Martin who was walking down the street while Black and Ahmaud Arbery, who was simply jogging while Black. Locally, we have witnessed the continued failure of Law enforcement to fully investigate and prosecute crimes, lest we forget Ryan Stokes, Terrence Bridges, Donnie Sanders and Cameron Lamb. The JCBA cannot, without moral conflict, continue to encourage Black communities to maintain faith and trust that local law enforcement will perform the very function that taxpayer dollars employ them to do! What choice does Kansas City leave its citizens other than to peaceably protest to no end? How can Kansas City continue to use Black faces to showcase diversity, equity, and inclusion, all while ratifying continued obliteration of Black bodies.

As a body of Black attorneys, we reject the very notion that Andrew Lester is protected within the Stand Your Ground laws. We also reject the false statement that the KCPD could not follow proper processing of the shooter due to the inability to get a witness statement from Mr. Ralph Yarl. There are many cases where the KCPD not only arrested but held suspects in custody for shooting crimes where the victim died. The failure to perform the function of law enforcement has allowed a dangerous person to evade the legal process. These statements made by Kansas City officials are an insult to the intelligence of the Kansas City legal and lay communities. If Kansas City is serious about restoring trust to law enforcement agencies and building a safe community for all its citizens, the Kansas City law enforcement agencies must conduct a full and unbiased investigation and prosecute the shooter to the HIGHEST EXTENT of the law. To fail the Black Kansas City community again will undoubtedly decrease public trust to eliminate bias, prejudice, and racism.

Further, approximately 70% of the City's operating budget is allocated to public safety with over \$250 million dedicated to the police department, yet the City of KCMO has no authority over KCPD decisions, policies, practices, and procedures. We ask that you contact your state representative and continue demanding local control of the KCPD. As a primarily African-American Bar Association, we remain committed to our purpose. We ask our supporters and colleagues in the legal community to stand with us.

We are relieved to have spoken with the family of Ralph Yarl and to learn of his miraculous recovery. The JCBA lifts the family in prayers of peace, full restoration, and health. The JCBA stands with the victim and his family in strength and dignity.

We ask that the legal community remember the oath “to practice law . . . with consideration of the defenseless and oppressed” to make Kansas City a better place for ALL of its citizens.

With Power,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. J. Brown', written in a cursive style.

Jackson County Bar Association, President