

We share the community outrage regarding Judge Zimmerman's behavior last week and call for his removal from the bench. Judge Zimmerman not only made racist and demeaning statements about Kevin Peterson Jr. and his family, he also admitted to his support of the police investigation. In doing so, Judge Zimmerman confirmed what many people believe – that some members of the judiciary are biased or not impartial.

Judges must be held to a high standard. They are empowered to put people in cages, impose large fines, and remove people from their homes. On July 21, 2020, the Clark County District Court issued a Statement on Equality and Access to Justice, to which Judge Zimmerman's name was affixed, in which the court stated the following:

“We must develop a greater awareness of our own biases, both conscious and unconscious. We must reflect on our individual actions each day as well as support larger movements to eradicate racism. Every individual that appears in front of the court deserves justice rooted in equality and fairness.”

After Judge Zimmerman's behavior was revealed, the Clark County District Court issued another statement that noted “zero tolerance for racism”. If the court truly means those words, the court should demand Judge Zimmerman's resignation immediately. Otherwise, the court is accepting the presence and impact of known bias and racism. Time will not heal this wound – accountability is the necessary first step to demonstrate that our system will not tolerate racism in any form.

At Northwest Justice Project, we provide legal representation to low-income members of our community. We recognize that our country was built upon genocide and slavery, and to this day structural and systemic racism continues to be maintained in all of our institutions. Many of our clients of color have experienced racism by law enforcement and our courts. We are witness to how systemic racism deals an unfair hand to people of color and results in violence, poverty, and early death. Only with intentional and concerted actions by every member of our community to identify and eliminate those harms will eradicate racism and ensure true justice.

We cannot allow Judge Zimmerman's actions to go unaddressed. Communities of color in Clark County are entitled to empathetic and impartial judges and a court system built on equity and fairness. Judges who abuse their power and express hateful, discriminatory attitudes towards people in our community should not remain in office. Judge Zimmerman must be removed.

-The Northwest Justice Project Vancouver Office.