

March 17, 2021

Last week, District Court Judge Darvin Zimmerman made racially biased statements about Kevin Peterson Jr., a young Black man who was killed last fall by Clark County Sheriff's deputies. The content of Zimmerman's remarks was ignorant, offensive, and infuriating. Those comments were also indicative of systemic racism in our county and in our country.

When people of color say flashing lights on a police car mean something different to them than to people with white skin, that's systemic racism. When the mother of a Black child feels the need to pray every time that child leaves the house, that's systemic racism. When advocates and attorneys and plaintiffs and defendants tell us that they have lost faith and trust in our legal system, that's systemic racism. When a judge in our county's court system maligns a Black man killed by sheriff's deputies, that's systemic racism.

After the video went public, Zimmerman claimed he was misunderstood. A week later, he used a spokesperson to issue a statement branded as an apology. But instead of actually apologizing and meaning it, he spent the majority of the message trying to demonstrate he has a history of being a friend to people of color.

His deflection leaves many of us feeling that he is not sorry for what he said; he is sorry that he got caught.

And that's too bad. Because it shows how much more work we have to do to address systemic racism in Clark County.

Many of us--probably, most of us--have said things that we thought were private, and which, if made public, would cause no small amount of trouble. We are human, and humans screw up. What matters is not only the mistakes we make, but what we do immediately after we make them.

The wound from Judge Zimmerman's comments is like so many other wounds people of color in Clark County have to bear every single day. He failed to recognize those wounds and accept them as real. He failed to find empathy for the wounds of others. He failed to apologize and mean it, and he failed to make amends. And so the wound remains open.

In addition to the appalling content of his comments, the context of those comments is a violation of the public trust and of proper judicial conduct. His actions raise serious questions about his judgment and about all of his past judicial decisions, especially those that involved people of color. He has caused our community to question not only his conduct, but our entire legal system. Because of this, he has been removed from his current duties and attorneys have filed requests to ensure he not preside over their cases. And Judge Zimmerman has also said he will "step away" for a while. All of these steps are good and necessary. But since Judge Zimmerman can't demonstrate that he truly understands the impact of his actions, then he

needs to step down, so a new judge can be appointed, and could take an active role in rebuilding trust in our community.

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