Rep. Bowen Statement on George Floyd and Uprisings Against Police Violence
“It Is Time for True Transformation”

MILWAUKEE - Reflecting on the murder of Minneapolis resident George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer and the subsequent uprisings across the nation against police violence, State Rep. David Bowen (D-Milwaukee) released the following statement:

My soul aches; My heart hurts. To see the violence inflicted on Black bodies in this country, time and time again, at the hands of the very people who are sworn to protect & serve our communities is crushing. And yet it keeps happening. George Floyd was a man. A father. A brother. A son. A Christian. A beloved member of his community. And he was murdered in the street when an officer with 18 disciplinary complaints against him decided that the way he would ‘protect and serve’ was by kneeling on the neck of a man for almost nine minutes. A man who had already been restrained, and posed no threat to anyone. All while his fellow officers stood by, unbothered and unmoved by the cries for help of a fellow human being who just wanted to stay alive.

Even if this were an isolated incident, it would be unacceptable, and a stain on the soul of our nation. But as we know all too well, this was not an isolated incident. This violence keeps happening, and despite rhetoric, updates to training, and tidy, superficial reforms, nothing has actually changed. George Floyd is not just the victim of Derek Chauvin and his fellow officers in the Minneapolis Police Department. George Floyd is the victim of a system that has criminalized and marginalized Black bodies, Black hopes, Black dreams, and Black communities for hundreds of years. A system that has also claimed the lives of Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, David McAtee, Atatiana Jefferson, Mike Brown, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Joel Acevedo, Tony Robinson, Dontre Hamilton, Sylville Smith, and countless others across Wisconsin and across America in the past decade alone.

People ask me when I think these protests and ‘riots’ might end. I want to remind them that ‘a riot is the voice of the unheard.’ Now do not get me wrong - I do not condone violence or
destruction for its own sake, especially if that violence and destruction is provoked and perpetuated by white supremacists or protest tourists who come into our neighborhoods seeking a thrill, who leave our businesses and communities in flames, only return to their comfortable, insulated, and privileged lives to watch as we are left cleaning up the ashes left behind in their wake. Our pain will not be exploited.

But too many in our communities are the same ‘unheard’ that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of more than half a century ago. And the unheard feel sadness, they feel anguish, and they feel rage. Their voices matter. Their voices deserve to be heard. Not just in the streets, not just on the television, but in the halls of power across this entire country. Their message deserves to ring out: that we will not be satisfied until our police forces stop murdering our brothers and sisters in the streets. Until the people that should be keeping us safe act more like peacemakers, and less like an occupying army. Until we see an America that has truly reckoned with the darkness in its soul and atoned for the sins of the past.

As an elected official and as a Black man, I feel the frustration & pain of the people. I feel their anger. Throughout my 8 year elected career, I have fought tooth and nail to see substantive reforms instituted in both Milwaukee County and in the State Capitol in Madison but the bulk of them have been blocked. And so, change and progress continue to elude us. It is clear that the calm, incremental, reform approach - no matter how well-intentioned - has failed us. It is time to re-examine the status quo and build something new. Everything must be on the table to hold law enforcement agencies & officers accountable to the standard of dignity that is owed to the community.

It is time for true transformation.

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