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Statement from Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers on Racism and Justice

“It is my obligation to address the devaluation of Black lives in the nation and in our community. The frightening killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Manuel Ellis, John T. Williams, and so any others are only the most recent in a history of injustices and horrors committed against the Black community. Slavery predated our nation and funded our Founding. Jim Crow and the failure of Reconstruction offered only the illusion of freedom to Black Americans. Today, we see racialized policing leading to the over-representation of persons of color in our criminal justice system and jails. This is unacceptable, and we must change.

“We must accept the role we and our institutions historically and institutionally have played in devaluing Black lives. The devaluation and degradation of Black lives is not unique to this place or time. All levels of government have been responsible for the oppression and death of persons of color. Black people have been and are still disenfranchised at the polls and been the victims of redlining and segregation. Our nation’s failure to equitably deliver health care and social services to Black communities, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in a disproportionate number of unnecessary deaths. We cannot accept our history without acknowledging our nation’s involvement.

“In the last weeks, I have seen the best and worst of Snohomish County. We have seen concerned people protest police brutality, racism, and violence. While these allies march for peace and justice; agitators, opportunists, and white supremacist groups have infiltrated these protests and caused damage. They do not seek justice for George Floyd; they seek to spread hate and maintain the comfort of their lives. I strongly condemn racism and white supremacy. There is no room for it in Snohomish County. We all must commit ourselves to anti-racist actions to bring about an equitable, just, and safe world for our Black neighbors.

“Whether or not my fellow white Americans accept it, we benefit from these racist structures and foundations of our society. Like everyone who is demonstrating here and across the country, I am eager for change. Our government will work to deliver progress and advance racial justice. I ask our law enforcement allies to join us to make real, lasting change.

“We must never forget the names of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Manuel Ellis, John T. Williams, and so many others to ensure their legacy becomes the change our nation so desperately needs. We must take action to redefine public safety to include the health, humanity, and dignity of every person in our borders. I vow to redouble my work to tackle the inequities born of racism. I support the Governor’s efforts for independent investigation and prosecution of deaths at the hands of law enforcement.

“Changing systems and cultures requires that tough decisions be made. Maintaining the status quo is far easier than tackling change. I pledge to lean into those changes no matter the discomfort it brings. I call on our community to join me in ensuring that we do not fall back on these commitments. Our lives and our humanity depend on us holding true to these promises and each other.

“I, like everyone, must do more. Addressing institutional and systemic racism is not political – it is our duty to our Black neighbors. This is a moral issue where one must take a stance. Where silence is violence, I am choosing to act. To do otherwise would betray my core beliefs as an American and human being. The great musician Nina Simone once said that freedom means living without fear. I will continue to stand in solidarity with our Black community to create a freer world without fear of racism and violence. Black Lives Matter. The future is counting on us; now is the time for action.”

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