



STATEMENT OF THE NORTH CAROLINA
PUBLIC DEFENDER COMMITTEE ON RACIAL EQUITY (NC PDCORE)

September 27, 2016

On Tuesday, September 20th, Keith Lamont Scott was shot and killed by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police, who reportedly approached Mr. Scott for suspicion of possession of marijuana and possession of a gun in an open carry state. This death, like so many more, was avoidable. To the family of Keith Scott, we offer our sincerest condolences. To the protesters in Charlotte who are raising their voices against racially biased policing, we stand with you. To the stakeholders in the criminal justice system, we call on you to heed the call for change.

While the details of this killing remain contested, the persistence of racial disparities in the criminal justice system is clear and deeply troubling. Study after study after study confirms what our communities of color have been telling us for decades: race influences who is stopped, who is searched, who is arrested, who is subject to use of force, who is held on bail, who is convicted, and who is sentenced to harsher punishments. This appalling reality cannot continue.

As public defenders, we stand for the right to due process for people of all races, creeds, and incomes. Today, we renew our pledge to eradicate the plague of racial inequity in our justice system. We recognize and respect the steps that have been taken by some police, prosecutors and judges in our state towards that goal. Still, we can—and must—do better.

We were dismayed by CMPD's gross lack of transparency in the days following the shooting. Chief Putney did not release any videos until five days after the shooting, and only did so after intense public pressure and the independent release of a video taken by Mr. Scott's wife. Withholding this evidence only furthered the mistrust between civilians and police. Likewise, the implementation of a law preventing the public from viewing body camera or dashcam footage of events of utmost importance to the public will do nothing to heal the open wounds made visible by the Charlotte protests.

We can appreciate the need to carefully gather and review evidence before determining whether to charge or admonish an officer. The stark contrast, however, between the treatment of an officer-as-suspect and civilian-as-suspect further highlights the need for a searching and thorough reckoning with the absence of equity in our criminal system.

The North Carolina Public Defender Committee on Racial Equity invites the public and criminal justice stakeholders to join us in sincere dialogue and concrete action to create the system that we deserve and so desperately long for.