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CALCASA Stands in Solidarity with Racial Justice Advocates: Criminalization Will Not End Sexual Violence

SACRAMENTO, June 2, 2020 -- The fight to end sexual violence in the United States has always also required a concurrent fight against racism. Prejudice and discrimination on the basis of both sex and race are woven together in the issue of sexual violence, and so we cannot effectively combat one without combatting the other. As the nation grapples with renewed attention on police brutality, and vulnerable communities continue to endure violence and oppression that has been with this country since its founding, we are reminded of our critical commitment to center anti-racism in our work, and to truly assert the fundamental dignity of all people. Black Lives Matter.

We have been in the throes of a racism pandemic for decades and have seen the way racism has affected our approach and our ability to advocate for justice.

For a generation, our movement has over-relied on law enforcement as a primary response to sexual assault, rather than focusing on solutions that will prevent violence in the first place. We have successfully drawn the nation's attention to issues of crime and punishment, at the expense of rectifying the social conditions and systemic inequities that allow sexual violence to subsist in our communities. CALCASA no longer supports that as a primary approach; we acknowledge that criminalization does not and will not end sexual violence. Law enforcement must continue to respond to sexual violence when called, but we must reaffirm our commitment to go beyond a paradigm that focuses too narrowly on perpetration and offenders. We must embrace a larger view of what a world free from violence in all its forms can look like. This includes law enforcement accountability.

George Floyd's tragic murder at the hands of law enforcement in Minneapolis brings to mind the killing of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, which did not lead to criminal charges for nearly two months later, and only after a recording had been made public. It comes several months after Louisville police killed a 27-year-old emergency medical technician, Breonna Taylor, after bursting into her own apartment, and less than a year after a Fort Worth police officer killed Atatiana Jefferson as she played video games in her home. It comes just a few weeks after the five-year anniversary of the death of Freddie Gray in the custody of Baltimore police. The fact that these lives and countless others ended prematurely by those sworn to protect them, reminds us of our ongoing commitment to our racial justice work.

This is a time for us as a movement, experts who are positioned to understand the many intersecting forms of trauma and violence inflicted on our communities, to continue stepping up and speaking out. "As leaders in the anti-sexual violence movement, we are committed to advocating on behalf of survivors everywhere, and will not back down from being a voice for our field and for our broader movement," stated CALCASA CEO, Sandra Henriquez, "In light of COVID-19, these are especially difficult times for survivors of all forms of

violence, who will need our continued support. Our response to these compounding crises - a 'racism pandemic' - must be driven by our values." Accordingly, we will continue to fearlessly engage the difficult issues and oppressive structures that plague our society, and advocate on behalf of the rape crisis centers that will always be a place of support for every survivor, in California and beyond.

About CALCASA

The California Coalition Against Sexual Assault provides leadership, vision and resources to rape crisis centers, individuals and other entities committed to ending sexual violence. CALCASA is committed to ending sexual violence through a multifaceted approach of prevention, intervention, education, research, advocacy and public policy. Through ongoing communication and meetings with constituents, CALCASA relays the challenges and successes of local work to the statewide and national levels and best practices, evidence-based and practice-based programs at the state and national levels to local constituents. For more information, visit <https://www.calcasa.org>.

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