



January 17, 2017

Dr. King, Justice, and the CPD

As I watched young people of every ethnicity and racial group enjoy themselves all together at our 10th Annual HEALTH CHALLENGE honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on his national holiday this year, I saw sincere, natural interactions, and lots of fun. I saw young people learning more about Dr. King's teachings through our presentations and discussions, and how to lead healthy lives with great nutrition and enjoyable exercise. Each year we hold the HEALTH CHALLENGE, I am reminded that when we started the MLK HEALTH CHALLENGE 10 years ago that only 53 years earlier we celebrated *Brown v. Board of Education*, the United States Supreme Court case in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional and a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. As a result of this landmark decision, today our participants are multicultural, and we celebrate MLK Day at a public school in Oak Park, Illinois. But I also can only wonder - what does the future hold for these bright young people? What changes are in store for them? What changes in our society will they pursue?

"Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle." – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Watching the kids at our event led me to try to connect Dr. King's teachings with our communities and our interactions with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) in efforts to make our communities safe, thriving and vibrant places in which to live. The U.S. Justice Department recently released its 164 page report from their year-long investigation of the Chicago Police Department. The Justice Department has not remained silent.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

According to the Investigation of the Chicago Police Department by the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and United States Attorney's Office Northern District of Illinois, dated January 13, 2017, there are five major categories of findings:

1. CPD engages in a pattern or practice of unconstitutional use of force.
2. Chicago's deficient accountability systems contribute to CPD's pattern or practice of unconstitutional conduct.
3. CPD does not provide officers with sufficient direction, supervision, or support to ensure lawful and effective policing.
4. CPD must better support and incentivize policing that is lawful and restores trust among Chicago's marginalized communities.
5. CPD must change practices to restore trust and ensure lawful policing.

Dr. King fought and spoke against these very police practices when he said in his "I Have a Dream" speech,

“We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.” Today, here in Chicago, 54 years later, black people are still facing the same horrors of police brutality.

What more would Dr. King say about our situation now in Chicago? After his own encounter with police in Birmingham resulting in his arrest, Dr. King wrote from his jail cell, “... I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Injustice in policing our communities and in our criminal justice system affects all of us – community members AND police. Police are our fellow community members. It is imperative that the Justice Department’s recommendations be studied and fully implemented. Transparent and effective accountability systems are routine in any excellent organization, including police departments. If our police do things the right way, our police should have no worries about community members second-guessing them or mistrusting them.

More importantly, we must provide more just communities where people are afforded opportunities for healthy and vibrant communities. When unemployment is low and communities are vibrant, we will experience less crime and less need for police in our communities. We have a choice: to ignore the needs of black communities, or to continue to increase policing, destroying lives and communities. It is no surprise that the 50 Chicago Public Schools that closed are in communities with more crime and higher rates of police misconduct.

So, our young people can be our best hope and inspiration for our future, and whose future we must safeguard as we move forward with our police reforms. And, we can all strive to remember these words from Dr. King, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'La Shawn K. Ford', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District