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Fellow Alaskans,

As we watch events unfolding in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd, we are saddened to see again that the ideals on which our society is founded are far from the reality of many people's lives. We recognize that as a court system we must commit ourselves to making these ideals real by once again dedicating our efforts to ensuring that we provide an accessible and impartial forum for the just resolution of all cases.

We recognize that too often African-Americans, Alaska Natives, and other people of color are not treated with the same dignity and respect as white members of our communities. And we recognize that as community members, lawyers, and especially as judicial officers, we must do more to change this reality.

Our country and our state are built upon the principle that all of us are created equal. And our courts are tasked with putting that principle into action by allowing people to seek redress for their grievances with the assurance that they will be heard and treated fairly. When so many members of our community are not heard or are not treated fairly, we must make changes.

As judges we must examine what those changes must be, what biases - both conscious and unconscious - we bring, and how we can improve our justice system so that all who enter may be assured they will receive equal treatment. We must continue our efforts to make our court system and its judges reflect the community that we serve. We look forward to continued progress from the work of our Fairness and Access Commission; our regular meetings with rural communities; and the many outreach programs, such as The Color of Justice, to which the court system and individual judges dedicate time and resources.

As lawyers we must work to improve access to legal assistance for individuals and communities, breaking down barriers that keep so many people in need from having meaningful access to our courts. And we must examine why people of color continue to be incarcerated and punished at rates that far exceed those of white offenders. We must also work to attract more people of color to the practice of law and, ultimately, to judicial careers.

As community members we must work with our neighbors to help heal the raw wounds of racism and history that have been so painfully laid bare. It is only by working together that we can hope to move beyond the pain that is so evident today.

We commit ourselves and the court system to seek always to ensure equal justice under the law. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently stated long ago, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Chief Justice Joel H. Bolger
Justice Daniel E. Winfree
Justice Peter J. Maassen
Justice Susan M. Carney