



January 5, 2014

Sandra Johnson
Bloomington City Attorney
1800 West Old Shakopee Road
Bloomington, MN 55431-3027

Dear Ms. Johnson,

I am writing in response to news reports that you are considering filing criminal charges and seeking victim restitution against the organizers of the Black Lives Matter protest that took place at the Mall of America on Saturday, December 20th. I respectfully urge you to reconsider filing charges and, in the event that you do file charges, to not seek restitution.

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The Black Lives Matter movement is aimed at peacefully drawing attention to the realities of police discrimination and violence faced by communities of color every day in the United States, including the tragic deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and others at the hands of police. That message is no less worthy than raising awareness of cancer and other messages that the Mall of America has welcomed in the past. The fact that the Mall of America declined to welcome to Black Lives Matter did not transform their peaceful gathering into a riot. The Black Lives Matter demonstration would have had an impact similar to the welcomed gathering of 7200 people gathered to sing in solidarity for victims of cancer, but for the massive police presence and the decision to shut down stores and limit movement for several hours. This demonstration was the third such gathering organized by the group. All three demonstrations were peaceful, yet the only arrests came at the hands of Bloomington police and you are the only prosecutor considering charges against organizers.

In a community in which black residents are 11 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than white residents, even though both groups have similar usage rates, and in a nation where black males are 21 times more likely to be killed by police than white males, open discussion of these issues is all the more critical. Rather than focus energy and resources on punishing the organizers and seeking restitution for decreased holiday sales as a result of the decision to lock down the mall, I urge you and the City of Bloomington to join the conversation about ways in which we can remedy the massive racial disparities in our criminal justice system and restore the community's trust in law enforcement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Samuelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Charles Samuelson
Executive Director



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