

**Statement by San Francisco Elected Public Defender Manohar Raju
Special Committee on The Office Of The Attorney General
April 21, 2021**

Good Afternoon Honorable Assemblymembers and thank you for the opportunity to be part of this conversation. My name is Mano Raju, and I am the elected Public Defender of San Francisco.

I'm honored to represent the criminal defense community and the movement for true and transformative justice in California. I want to begin today with the guilty verdict returned by the jury in the Derek Chauvin trial yesterday. To be clear — the jury reached the right decision. But as others have said, this isn't justice. Justice is George Floyd being alive today; justice is ending police violence against Black and Brown communities; justice is diverting resources from police to programs that will help those communities thrive. A guilty verdict here provided some measure of accountability, but it is far short of Justice.

It's important to note that this outcome would not have been possible had Keith Ellison, the Attorney General of Minnesota, not stepped in to handle the case. Simply put, if this prosecution had been left to local law enforcement, Derek Chauvin likely would NOT have been convicted.

In the past several years our country has awakened to the frequency and brutality of police violence. And just this week, we've seen it again: Ma'Khia Bryant, killed by police just after the Chauvin verdict was announced, and Mario Gonzalez killed Monday during an arrest by the Alameda Police Department. And again we wonder - will we know the truth of what happened? If the investigation reveals wrongdoing, will it be swept under the rug, or will it be brought to light?

It's crucially important that law enforcement accountability be a top priority of the next Attorney General. This responsibility also extends beyond these most extreme circumstances, into rooting out racist, biased, and violent subcultures within the ranks.

It's not just important that the next Attorney General steps up on law enforcement accountability issues; they must also step DOWN when pushed to defend unjust and inhumane policies and practices on behalf of state and local prosecutors. Historically, California Attorney Generals have vigorously and consistently fought against the appeals and petitions of incarcerated people challenging wrongful convictions or inhumane prison conditions. This includes the California Attorney Generals' continued defense of every death sentence, their refusal to acknowledge strong innocence claims, racial bias in these decisions, or the fact that many people on death row suffer from mental illness. It includes the way the Attorney General's office has defended the California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation's actions, which contributed to the deaths of 221 people in CDCR custody since the beginning of the pandemic. These positions — in litigation related to criminal appeals, the death penalty, prison conditions, and more — are inhumane. They are shameful. We believe it is possible for the Attorney General's office to fulfill its obligation to represent the State in these actions without further degrading the human beings at the center of the issue, and we call upon the next Attorney General to make it so.

Finally, I want to note a few other things that we look forward to the next Attorney General taking a key leadership role on:

- “Clean Slate” efforts: the Department of Justice has the most power and responsibility for maintaining, and expunging, criminal records. California is ready for a new, more efficient, effective, and fair approach.
- We urge the next Attorney General to take a strong position regarding ending the practice of turning people over to ICE. after they have earned their release from jail and prison.
- If confirmed, we look forward to Attorney General Bonta’s continued leadership at the intersection of the criminal legal system and private industry by ensuring that we eliminate the predatory bail bonds industry and continue to move away from using private prisons and detention centers.
- And we look forward to his continued leadership in taking powerful and refreshing stances regarding violence against the Asian American Pacific Islander community, and others, by recognizing that punishment is not the only possible tool, and often not the best solution to these problems.

This is a unique moment in the history of our state and country. People are ready for true change in the criminal legal system in a way that we haven’t seen before. If confirmed, Attorney General Bonta has an incredible opportunity to seize that momentum — momentum generated by communities impacted by this system and their allies — to TRULY and meaningfully address this system’s failures; to promote true justice, true accountability, true public safety, health, and healing. I, along with my office, will be here to support him in these efforts, and to help keep him accountable.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mano Raju". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mano" and last name "Raju" clearly legible.

Mano Raju