February 24, 2023

To the School of Social Work Community:

We would like to bring attention to the horrific death of Tyre Nichols and an opportunity for social action to support the family or community.

Who Is Tyre?

Tyre Nichols is remembered as a supportive father and son, a lover of sunsets and photography, and an awesome skateboarder. His mom describes him as “gentle, kind, and joyful.”

Call to Action

One of the most important actions we can take is educating ourselves. We would like to point our community to the perspectives and work of the Network to Advance Abolitionist Social Work whose mission is to “amplify a practice of social work aimed at dismantling the prison industrial complex and building the life-affirming horizon to which abolition aspires.” As social workers, it is important that we think deeply about harm done to Black communities and how we—as an organized group—can police less and promote justice, equity, and well-being more.

Our Response

With the death of George Floyd in summer 2020, a resurgence in awareness occurred around how Black lives have continually been affected by police violence. This did lead to many policy changes on a smaller scale, but Tyre Nichols’s death emphasizes the need for substantial action. As Mel Wilson—retired Senior Policy Advisor for the NASW—wrote in a recent NASW Blog post, “The brutal death of Mr. Nichols is a stark reality that the promise of police reform” is far from realized.

We want to acknowledge the disparities in how the Black police officers involved in this violence were disciplined differently than the white police officers and first responders involved. While this incident may challenge our typical societal understanding of police brutality, it highlights that this is systemic racism.

Additionally, this is not only an issue of racial justice, but disability justice as Tyre Nichols had Crohn’s disease, which greatly impacted his physical body size. We know that disabled people are disproportionately affected by police violence, especially when their disability intersects with other oppressed identities.
We want to encourage our community to refrain from sharing and reposting the video of Tyre Nichols’s murder, as this can contribute to vicarious trauma for those watching (particularly those with lived experience of racialized oppression).

Linked above and also provided below are various sources for honoring his life and art, as well as actions that can be taken to tangibly show support and stand in solidarity with his family and others impacted.

Resources

1. Tyre Nichols’s Photography: https://thiscaliforniakid2.wixsite.com/tnicholsphotography
2. Tyre Nichols Skateboarding Montage: https://youtu.be/i_hZGVI2U-4

In gratitude and solidarity

Members of the Committee for Social Justice

School of Social Work