



Contact: Natasha M. Dartigue, President
Email: info@monumentalcitybar.com
Website: www.monumentalcitybar.com

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Monumental City Bar Association Supports Rashad James

Monumental City Bar Association (MCBA) is incensed by the events that occurred on March 6, 2019 at the Harford County District Court. Rashad James, a black attorney, was questioned and detained by a deputy of the Harford County Sheriff's Office. Attorney James presented himself before the court and was received as counsel in an expungement hearing before the judge. After the matter concluded, Mr. James was unconstitutionally detained by the deputy and questioned regarding the veracity of him being an attorney. There appeared no plausible reason for questioning and detaining Mr. James other than his race. It is unconscionable that the deputy continued to detain Mr. James despite being provided with information that he was an attorney. The actions of the Harford County deputy sheriff exemplify the widespread problem that black men are routinely targeted as criminal suspects. Such aggressive conduct by law enforcement will not be tolerated. Monumental City Bar Association stands in solidarity with attorney Rashad James.

The deputy's actions epitomize the constant bias, daily micro-aggressions and racial discrimination that confront black people in the criminal justice system. The indignity faced by Mr. James was not an isolated incident. The problem is pervasive. In courtrooms across this region, black men are routinely perceived as untruthful and assumed to be criminal defendants regardless of their actual position. Upon learning of the terrible news of Mr. James' detention, MCBA members shared numerous occurrences when they appeared as counsel but were ignored, addressed in disrespectful tones, or utterly disregarded simply because individuals refused to believe the black man in the courtroom was the attorney, not a defendant.

Racial profiling and discrimination are a long standing and deeply rooted problem among law enforcement agencies. This incident underscores the crucial need for racial bias training and policy implementation among courthouse personnel and law enforcement agencies throughout the state. The consequences of failing to implement these interventions can be dire as the harm is real and morally significant. Instances, such as the one that occurred in the Harford County District Court, cause heightened stress to the targeted individual, undermine trust in the black attorney and adversely impact the community. Daily indignities where black attorneys experience situations where they are perceived as intellectually inferior undermines credibility, lessens effectiveness and impedes work performance.

MCBA seeks a full and transparent investigation of the Harford County incident, as well as an inquiry by an independent investigatory body. Accountability is key and all misconduct must be sanctioned. MCBA implores all members of the legal community, regardless of race or ethnicity, to speak up and directly confront incidents of racial discrimination. We must treat all persons in the Court with respect and dignity. A failure to act erodes the legal system and undermines the public trust. MCBA is committed and will remain vigilant in fighting against racial discrimination, both in and out of the courtroom.

"For racism wastes the human potential endangering the public tranquility and compromises the national integrity to the detriment of everyone." - C. Eric Lincoln.

Monumental City Bar Association, founded in 1935, is the oldest and largest specialty bar association in the state of Maryland. MCBA was created to advocate for African American attorneys and to promote and protect the interests of the African American community at large. MCBA members have made significant contributions to the legal community. Our membership includes those working in the judiciary, state and federal government, law firms, academia, corporate and non-profit organizations throughout the State of Maryland.