

AN OPEN LETTER TO MAYOR ROXANN WEDEGARTNER  
From the Coalition for Racial Justice

May 25, 2022

Dear Mayor Wedegartner,

We were surprised to read your public comments in the Greenfield Recorder on May 6, in which you denied the validity of a legal ruling that found racial discrimination had taken place within the Greenfield Police Department. You were quoted as saying, “I’m confident that at the end of the process, Chief Haigh will be completely exonerated,” while also noting that you will need to “sit a little while with the facts.” We would like to make you aware of how the facts look from our perspective as a coalition that is actively working to dismantle racism.

Your public statements in opposition to the jury’s ruling came at a time when many racial justice activists in Greenfield were finding hope in the message the verdict sent. The verdict seemed to say there is no place for racial discrimination in the City of Greenfield, and that it is possible to hold even the most powerful city institutions accountable to that ideal. Unfortunately, the sentiment you expressed contradicts that sense of progress. Moving forward, we hope to see greater transparency, accountability, and opportunities for public input in your treatment of issues pertaining to racial justice in our community—including this case.

As mayor, your statement of confidence that Chief Haigh will be “completely exonerated” undermines the validity of the racial discrimination claim, the jury’s ruling, and the progress of work against racism in our community. You have sent a message to constituents who experience discrimination that even if a jury believes them, you and other people in power might continue to invalidate and act against their claim. To those who might perpetrate discrimination, whether maliciously or unconsciously, you have offered the possibility of your office’s support. We hope it is obvious, as we commemorate the two-year anniversary of George Floyd’s murder, that the lives of people of color are in danger when there is even tacit support for a culture of racism in police departments.

A slightly closer look at this particular case makes it appear obvious that racism has been a problem in the Greenfield Police Department for some time. According, again, to the Recorder, one of the key officers named in the recent discrimination case (Daniel McCarthy) had in 2015 come under public scrutiny for choosing to display the Confederate flag at his home, which made an interracial family in his neighborhood feel understandably unsafe. Why would the mayor of the City of Greenfield make public statements that indicate greater loyalty to this white officer and his white chief than to a Black colleague who has proven in court that discrimination took place?

Over the past two years, we have worked as a diverse group of Franklin County and North Quabbin organizations and businesses under the common goal of dismantling racism in our community. We work to counter the ways in which false beliefs about white supremacy are embedded in our institutions and community life, and to make our communities truly welcoming and supportive of people of color. Most of the time, we see that racism shows up in ways that are not provable in court. When it does, as in this case, we assume we are seeing just the tip of an iceberg—and that a more insidious or unconscious comfort with white supremacy, paired with negative or dismissive beliefs about people of color, lurk beneath the surface.

We hope that you will reflect on your role in setting the tone for the city's approach to racial justice. We believe this could be a learning experience for all involved: the beginning of a more thorough look at how we can work together to dismantle racism and make the region more inclusive and safer for everyone.

The organizations within our coalition see the office of the mayor as an important partner in improving the safety, health, and vitality of Franklin County communities. However, this recent series of events has jeopardized our sense of trust. By writing this letter, we hope to open up a conversation where we can learn together, and assess the possibility of future collaboration toward a truly inclusive and safe county for everyone.

If you are willing to think about how to use this moment to create real progress toward dismantling racism, we are ready to work and learn with you.

Sincerely,

Kaydance Scotto, Jenny Bender, Katri Schroeder and Juan Carlos Aguilar

*On behalf of the Coalition for Racial Justice*

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***Coalition for Racial Justice member organizations include:***

Center for Community Resilience after Trauma

Communities That Care Coalition

Deerfield Inclusion Group

DIAL/SELF

Franklin County Community Development Corporation

Franklin Land Trust

Heywood Healthcare

Hilltown Youth Performing Arts Program

Just Roots

Montague Catholic Social Ministries

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

NELCWIT

Pathways

Pioneer Valley Workers Center

Racial Justice Rising

Seeds of Solidarity

Social Justice Committee of All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church of Greenfield

Stone Soup Café

Sunderland Human Rights Commission Working Group

Tapestry Health

Traprock Center for Peace and Justice