OPEN LETTER TO PAMELA HANCOCK
COUNTY PROSECUTOR FOR MADISON COUNTY

We, the undersigned lawyers in Central Mississippi, write this open letter to Pamela Hancock, County Prosecutor for Madison County, to express our concerns over your recent social media posts and resulting statements to the media. In response to the protests, outrage and rioting following the recent murder of George Floyd, you were quoted as posting on social media (later withdrawn) “we can only hope the deadly (coronavirus) strain spreads in riots!” When asked about those posts by Mississippi Today, you were quoted as saying you meant those comments as a joke, executed, in your words, “poorly.”

To date, more than 35,000 Mississippians have been stricken with the deadly, incurable coronavirus disease and, sadly, families across the state are mourning the untimely deaths of more than 1,200 loved ones. Neither the coronavirus nor the death of George Floyd and resulting protests and riots is a joking matter. Even if we take you at your word that your comments were intended as a “poorly” executed joke, your comments evinced a racial undertone and potential bias which we find unacceptable, especially in a public official. While we all make mistakes and say things we wish we never would have said, words matter. The words of our public officials, especially our prosecutors, matter more. Our prosecutors, more than anyone in our criminal justice system, must speak and act impartially towards all of us, as required by our state and federal Constitutions. In fact, that is required in the oath you took as a prosecutor, and the oath we all took as lawyers. There must be no hint that you, as a prosecutor, carry any racial animus or bias in your work, and that is why your social media post was so damaging to your professional credibility and to our criminal justice system.

The people of Madison County and the undersigned are counting on you to be a part of the solution, and not a part of the problem. As you know, Madison County has more than 40,000 citizens of color. In your role as Madison County Prosecutor with jurisdiction in the Justice Courts and County Courts, you are uniquely positioned at the gateway to our criminal justice system. Too many times, people of color are brought to that gateway because of racial bias, poverty, addiction, educational failures or other circumstances far out of proportion to their number in the general population. Once through that gateway, they may be marked and stained in society and life forever. We, as citizens and as lawyers, require that you, the gatekeeper, will treat everyone equally under the law.

In this moment of national introspection into systemic racism in our country, we expect you to undertake a similar look at your comments and your special role in our criminal justice system. You have the unique opportunity to rise above your “poorly” executed joke and make a positive difference for all the people of Madison County. We hope you will decide to do so.

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