



CAAPV issues the following statement following the June 5, 2020, protest:

Colorado Attorneys Against Police Violence (“CAAPV”) is an organization that was founded in the aftermath of the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. CAAPV was founded as a group of attorneys who have seen war waged on people of color and wanted to use our skillsets and knowledge to stop the carnage of black and brown bodies at the hands of the police. CAAPV was founded because we have no faith in the abilities of police departments to police themselves, because we have no faith in the government to make meaningful efforts to end systematic racism, oppression, and government sanctioned murder at the hands of law enforcement, and because we have seen the racist legal system fail Black and Brown people time and time again. CAAPV was founded because attorneys felt compelled to act and not sit idly by while our members, our friends, and our neighbors’ bodies are sacrificed.

We had originally planned a protest for Wednesday, June 3. We rescheduled that protest to Friday, June 5th because we wanted to be thoughtful, connect with community organizers on the ground, make sure that we had the right people at the table, and find a way to meaningfully offer knowledge and services to those who continue to be brutalized by the hands of Colorado police officers. We wanted to stand in solidarity, and not co-opt a cause that we care deeply about, a cause we have committed our careers, our resources, and our privilege to combat.

We fear that the cause that we showed up to support on Friday night was co-opted by precisely the power we showed up to protest. Now, we must differentiate ourselves and our mission from We Are Love Denver (“WALD”), the organization that was running Friday’s protest.

As an organization of lawyers, we are tasked to think critically and to be skeptical particularly of those in positions of power. We beg juries to question the evidence presented to them as absolute, and now we ask you to do the same.

At best, we have reason to believe that WALD was manipulated by Mayor Hancock and the City and County of Denver. At worst, we have reason to believe that WALD was an orchestrated attempt to continue to silence the voices of people of color, to suppress a movement as it was gaining momentum, and to chill constitutional rights.

We have since become aware of impassioned defenses by WALD that they are not affiliated with law enforcement and have had no consistent communication with leaders in the City and County of Denver. As it stands, that is not in line with our experiences and observations. Our investigation into WALD is ongoing, and should we become aware of information that meaningfully assuages our concerns about WALD and its messaging, we would welcome them to our table and fully support their cause. CAAPV’s does not seek to advise anyone or any group

on how to protest. Nevertheless, we remain steadfast in our concerns below. We encourage all of you to do your own research, think critically, and reach your own conclusions.

On Friday, we showed up in Civic Center Park in solidarity and in support of protesters. We intended to spread information about the need to pass SB 20-217, a bill designed to hold police accountable for their misconduct and defeat qualified immunity in Colorado – a bill that was being debated inside Capitol walls *while* we were on its steps. CAAPV intended to spread information explaining people's rights as they express their first amendment right to speak out against the oppressive and violent policing happening daily on our streets and across the country.

What we witnessed was a well-oiled “protest” machine that was far different from any of the protests we had experienced in the week before. The police presence was scarce. There was a newly printed, shiny banner and fancy stereo equipment using state power sources. We were given a time slot. The rigid organization of the program seems inconsistent with the fact that WALD was apparently formed mere days before. The lack of police presence was in sharp contrast to the protests of prior days, where police launched tear gas and bullets indiscriminately into crowds of protesters. One of WALD’s leaders is seen on social media identifying himself as a former cop.

We asked WALD if the civil rights lawyer who helped draft the qualified immunity bill could explain the bill and importance of it to the hundreds of protesters. WALD would not give her a microphone. As a result, not a single word was mentioned about this monumental law. As we were on the stage, a second group of marchers came in chanting “We Are Love.” As soon as we left the stage, the protesters were instructed to sit down and to silence themselves. Yet, we were encouraged to continue to hold our banner, a gift from a neighboring art studio boldly emblazoned with our core purpose – “In Defense of Black Life” – while the other speeches continued.

The messaging we witnessed was the type of rhetoric CAAPV submits has allowed the majority to feel comfortable while systemic racism rages on. What was promoted were messages of love and unity – while a nice message, not the right message for this time. There was an absolute void of any condemnation of the violent action of law enforcement – violent action that resulted in the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and so many others, and police action in response to protests that has been so violent that a Denver federal court was forced to intervene. There was no recognition of the dissent and hate law enforcement had been cultivating during days of protests, and for generations before us. Other than love and unity messaging, we heard messaging that people of color should take personal accountability in their interactions with law enforcement, and praise for those who had cleaned up graffiti. We heard religious platitudes and a global pandemic weaponized as ways to solve systemic racism.

We also heard some organic testimony from people of color on that stage who stepped outside of their comfort zones and told beautiful and vulnerable stories. CAAPV’s focus is on the murder of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Elijah McClain, Marvin Booker, Michael Marshall, and countless others at the hands of police. We continue to stand by those who showed up during the COVID-19 pandemic to literally put their lives on the line to fight for their right to exist.

After what felt like a “show,” we then witnessed hundreds, if not thousands of people, follow the WALD organizers down a very obviously pre-planned route – an effort that was buttressed by DPD vehicles straddling and blocking surrounding streets, and blocking protesters from behind

once they passed. That route ended at Cheesman Park, where a concert awaited. We have heard similar plots (a pre-planned route that seems to be controlled by police, messaging of unity rather than justice, and so forth) from our organizer friends in other cities.

As that group began to disperse, we witnessed a young black woman silenced repeatedly by WALD's organizers. First, they tried to move the crowd away from her. Once she got the microphone and began speaking about the violence and murder of local law enforcement, they physically took the microphone from her. As a result of the differentiating messages, two separate marches formed. The group that broke off from WALD was met with police in riot gear and tanks, from Denver and other jurisdictions. One of our own had police shine a flashlight in their face for about a minute before the police officer was deescalated by another officer. Most troubling of all, in that moment, when we offered our legal aid line, the protesters were so skeptical that they assumed we were also in cahoots with police and would not accept it.

We are cognizant that even in times of protest, people of color are used as pawns. If WALD was, indeed, manipulated by the power structures they intended to protest, we are empathetic.

But we must be clear: CAAPV was encouraged to hold our banner proclaiming our defense of black lives, while WALD supported their approved speakers crying out "we are one." Again, CAAPV does not seek to advise any one or any group on how to protest. We seek to be one with the vulnerable voices who have been braving Denver's streets and brutality at the hands of police while they fight for their right to live. We are in no way aligned with a racist and oppressive system that disproportionately enacts a litany of physical, emotional, and psychological violence on people of color. We are dedicated to fighting those abuses providing information for self-advocacy on the streets, by supporting common sense legislation, and by defending our most targeted and vulnerable community members when they are attacked by police or face unjust legal consequences. We are still here to support, share, educate, learn, and fight arm in arm with those who need the status quo to end. We will not be lulled to sleep or placated by clichés that do not reflect the lived experiences of people of color.

So let us be clear: Black lives matter. Police murder has always been and remains intolerable. The existing systems will not willingly concede their power to the people--power must be taken. No justice, no peace. We don't see justice in these streets.

June 7, 2020 – Approved by CAAPV
