



## Statement on Race and Equity

*June 5, 2020*

The gravity of the events across the country and here in Indiana demanding equity—both peaceful protests and violent outbursts—require a response from the judicial branch. The courts play a vital role in our society’s aim toward justice for all.

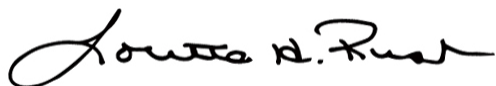
Courts are the hallowed halls within which justice is sought. It is guaranteed by due process and equal protection rights. But, if their power is abused, courts can be complicit in perpetuating the bias and inequity that are carved in our nation’s history. As Chief Justice of Indiana, I want to make known that we can and must do better.

Despite all we have worked to pursue, justice remains elusive to many persons of color in matters across the legal spectrum. There is a disconnect between what we aspire for in our justice system and what we have achieved. That may be hard to hear for all of us who work every day for fairness, but we must hear the voices that cry out in our streets and towns. We must acknowledge and confront the reality that our fellow community members say is their experience. And it is imperative we take action to change that experience—not ignore, justify, or disparage it. So, what can we do?

- To ensure the work of fairness and justice continues, we need to elevate the role of implicit bias training in our curriculum and educate ourselves about disproportionality and racial disparities in the justice system. Our court systems can provide the platform for the poor and for people of color to be heard through a collaborative model of justice: one that fosters legitimacy among those who might feel shut out; that informs and reforms those who might otherwise abuse power; and that promotes real, tangible conversations about our community’s most pressing needs and issues.
- Victims of biased hatred and racism must be able to rely on the courts. They must be treated with dignity, and those who stoke the fires of that hatred and racism must be held accountable.
- Families affected by poverty in our state must be shown both fairness and compassion, no matter their color. The disadvantaged and vulnerable must be protected by our legal system, not left to fend for themselves and crushed under its weight and its complexity.
- We must improve the pathway for more people of color to become lawyers and judges. People must see themselves, their experiences, and their backgrounds reflected in the bench and bar of this state to foster trust and understanding between the public and the judicial branch.
- And finally, the path to a lifetime of equal experience must begin with our children. Children in the court system, whether through juvenile justice or child welfare, must be treated equitably. Children, individuals, and families of color have at times been treated more harshly and punished more severely than their white counterparts. It is a fact, and it must stop.

To be sure, the complexities of race in America will not be solved by simply saying we will try to do better. Rather, we must take action for all of us to live in a better world. I charge our courts, our justice system partners, our lawyers, and our law schools to do so. I demand the same of myself. Since February, we've been accepting comments from the public on ways to improve the courts. Give us your perspective at [on.in.gov/innovate](http://on.in.gov/innovate).

The stained-glass window in our Supreme Court courtroom includes owls—symbols of wisdom. And wisdom comes from experience, knowledge, and good judgment. We must listen to and learn from the experiences of our communities who are too often unheard. Heeding their voices will give us the wisdom we need to correct the entrenched disparities that still divide us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Loretta H. Rush". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Loretta H. Rush  
*Chief Justice of Indiana*