



**Community Relations Board
Board of County Commissioners
Office of Community Advocacy
111 NW 1st Street • Suite 1034
Miami, Florida 33128-1994
T 305-375-5730 F 305-375-5715**

Teenager's Death Should Inspire Positive Change

**A POSITION PAPER FROM THE MIAMI-DADE COUNTY COMMUNITY RELATIONS BOARD
March 28, 2012**

The killing of Trayvon Martin is a painful blow to those who knew and loved him and a source of distress to all who believe in the value of human life in this community. The members of the Miami-Dade County Community Relations Board (CRB) have extended our condolences to Martin's family. Ronald Fulton, Trayvon's beloved uncle, is a member of the CRB Executive Committee.

The emotions of grief, bewilderment, pain and anger that this young man's death has created across our nation and the world, are being felt with particular poignancy in Miami-Dade County. Trayvon was a local kid, a young man of promise with deep family and personal ties to this community. Like so many of his peers, Trayvon was blessed with unique and valuable attributes that gave his life special worth. Young people such as these inspire a sense of hope for the future. The loss of any hurts us all.

These feelings of loss can exacerbate destructive impulses like hatred and revenge. We have all heard the shrill voices. Expressions of outrage and accusations come more sincerely from those who believe Trayvon's killing was unlawful and racially motivated. But when passions threaten to overwhelm, courage and fortitude are needed most.

Trayvon Martin's family members have helped to lead the way in calling for both justice and prayers for peace. Their example has helped to guide the many thousands of Miami-Dade young people, mainly high school and university students, who are awakening to the possibility that they *can* change the world in *this* community.

It is the youth who are creating a movement that may help save their generation from further devastation by gun violence and from the pervasive wrongs of prejudice and racial hatred. We applaud a movement that aspires to value every life in our community. Fueled by action and inspired by teenagers and young adults, these efforts are most sincerely welcomed.

The CRB also understands that Florida laws are critical to the safety and security of all residents. Last week, we reached out to Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle and she sent some of her senior attorneys to inform and educate us about the so-called "Stand Your Ground" law, (F.S. 776.032). We learned the following:

- The law allows a person who has used deadly force against another to avoid arrest by claiming that they feared for their life.
- A person who uses deadly force is not required to prove they were in actual danger of imminent death or great bodily injury. It is the state attorney who must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the fear of danger was not reasonable.
- Under the SYG law a judge may determine that the defendant is immune from prosecution depriving the prosecutor from ever presenting the case to a jury.
- Courts in Florida do not agree whether the SYG law protects a person who leaves a place of safety and causes injury or death to another. An amendment could make that clear.
- Florida's "Speedy Trial" law requires that the state attorney file charges and present its case to the court no later than 180 days after a defendant is arrested. Therefore, it is not always advisable to push for a speedy arrest as time may run out before all the evidence is collected. A hasty arrest can cause a case to be lost.
- The "Castle Doctrine" recognizes a person's right to defend their home or business and to use deadly force if they are placed in imminent danger of death or great bodily harm. It does not give a vigilante the right to chase a person down and shoot them.

There is much work to be done in the pursuit of justice for Trayvon Martin. The CRB supports the following actions:

- The Florida Legislature and the Governor's Task Force should take a hard look at the "Stand Your Ground" law to determine whether it achieves the outcomes intended or changes are needed to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. The CRB applauds the efforts of State Senator Oscar Brayton and Governor Rick Scott in this regard.
- Police in Sanford and in Seminole County should cooperate fully with the Special Prosecutor's investigation of the circumstances and motives that led to Trayvon Martin's death. We anticipate the best efforts of Prosecutor Angela Corey and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.
- Local officials and community leaders in Sanford should be receptive to recommendations from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Community Relations Service. There is a need to implement strategies that will better inform and engage family members and residents alike.
- DOJ criminal prosecutors should be both vigorous and fair in protecting the civil rights of Trayvon Martin as well as the admitted shooter, George Zimmerman.

People in our community are heartbroken over the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, a promising 17-year-old high school student, under such tragic and troubling circumstances. As we look for ways to respond, it is important that we support each other and engage with community members and responsible authorities in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. In this way, we can each do our part to pursue justice and healing.

The primary mission of the Miami-Dade County Community Relations Board (CRB) is to intervene quickly and effectively to prevent and reduce community tensions and conflict. The members are prominent local residents, representative of Miami-Dade's diverse community, who are business, civic, government and religious leaders. For nearly 50 years, the CRB (founded in 1963) has served as an advisor to county Mayors, Commissioners and administrators and to the community-at-large on issues impacting intergroup relations in Miami-Dade.



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MIAMI-DADE COUNTY COMMUNITY RELATIONS BOARD
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