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Dr. Bernice A. King CEO of The King Center, Decries Expulsion of Tennessee Lawmakers Who Stand with Students Protesting for Gun Reform

Atlanta, GA – On April 4th, before a crowd of more than 200 well-wishers, staff, family, and thousands more virtually, Rev. Dr. Bernice A. King, CEO of The King Center and daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mrs. Coretta Scott King, called for true peace which includes justice. She remembered and honored her father, admonishing the world to continue the movement in the spirit of Dr. King. She commended thousands of Nashville, Tennessee high school and college students who recently walked out of their classrooms to rally at their state capitol, demanding tougher gun control laws.

On March 27th, a gunman armed with assault weapons and a handgun killed three children and three adults at The Covenant School before committing suicide. Police said the 28-year-old shooter fired 152 rounds during the attack.

Dr. Bernice A. King said she thanks God for the young voices that are standing up for justice today. “I want to applaud young people who have dared to walk out of school and demand common sense gun responsibility and the banning of assault weapons. They chose a tactic that dramatized the issue but did not seek to physically or verbally harm anyone, which is in the spirit of nonviolence,” Dr. King said. “Now is the time to fulfill that legislation,” she added. The civil rights leader’s daughter continued to praise the students’ efforts and encouraged them to continue to resist and protest until their demanded change occurs. “Do as the people did in Montgomery, Alabama. Don’t let it just be a one-day protest but continue nonviolent protests regardless of the consequences. In Montgomery, in the 1950s, many suffered consequences. If we are going to change the state of this nation and world, we must recognize that we are in a season that requires that kind of sacrifice once again.”



Earlier this week, three state legislators, who joined the student protestors, faced expulsion. As a result, they were removed from their committee assignments by Tennessee's Speaker of the House. Also yesterday, Representatives Justin Jones and Justin Pearson, both Black, were expelled by a Republican led House; however, a White representative and protestor, Gloria Johnson, maintained her seat by a narrow vote. The Tennessee House vote that removes Representatives Jones and Pearson strips nearly 150,000 citizens of representation in two of the state's largest metro populations, that overwhelmingly elected both Black leaders.

The King Center CEO opposed the actions that targeted these three lawmakers. "Attempts to expel politicians, especially along party and color lines, are simply unjust and unfair. These types of actions, coupled with excessive criminal charges lofted at selected protestors, place the constitutional right to protest in jeopardy. On the night before my father was assassinated, he reminded us that 'the greatness of America is the right to protest for right.' So, if we truly want America to be great, we must ensure that this essential constitutional right is upheld for all, including our legislators," Dr. Bernice A. King said. "I challenged our young people to continue standing up for those things that are unjust in our society regardless of the sacrifices it may entail, because 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,' she added.

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About The King Center

The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (The King Center) is a 501(c) (3) organization established in 1968 by Mrs. Coretta Scott King. The King Center is the official living memorial and programmatic nonprofit organization committed to educating the world on the life, legacy, and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The King Center serves to inspire new generations to carry forward his unfinished work, strengthen causes and empower change-makers who are continuing his efforts today. The King Center's premiere educational initiative, Nonviolence365®, is based on Dr. King's nonviolent philosophy and methodology. His teachings engage participants from various sectors of society, including emerging and next-generation leaders, in modules and exercises that enhance communication, leadership, interpersonal, and conflict reconciliation skills, as well as empower individuals to address injustice.