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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BLACK BAR ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR CRIMINAL AND HATE CRIME CHARGES IN RACIALLY-CHARGED ASSAULT AGAINST BLACK YOUTH ON MLK DAY

When an individual commits a crime against Black youth while repeatedly calling them “niggers,” it is a textbook example of a hate crime. The Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr. Bar Association is beyond disgusted by the videos depicting Mark Allen Bartlett’s violent and racist attack on Black youths that took place on the Brickell Bridge in Miami on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (“MLK Day”). The perverse irony of Bartlett’s racist actions against young African-American boys, who were engaging in peaceful protests on MLK Day underscores the fact that even in a city as diverse as Miami, racism is an ongoing and deadly threat.

Weeks later, Bartlett has only been charged with carrying a concealed weapon without a permit. Currently, he is facing no charges for the actions he took against the Black teens. The day following the incident on Brickell Bridge, the Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr. Bar Association began discussions with Miami Chief of Police, Jorge Colina, who advised that the case had been assigned to the department’s hate crime division. We also reached out to the State Attorney’s Office for insight into the investigation. Although we are heartened by Chief Colina’s assurances, we believe a call for swift and meaningful action is needed.

Bartlett must be charged with a hate crime under Florida law. Along with assault, video evidence indicates Bartlett committed several other criminal acts when he exited his vehicle armed with an unlicensed firearm and confronted the Black youth on their bicycles, while repeatedly calling them niggers. Additional video footage released to the media shows Bartlett yelling “niggers suck” at another Black male protester. However, despite the overwhelming evidence demonstrating that Bartlett’s criminal acts were committed with racial animus, he has yet to be charged with additional crimes or hate crime enhancements. This is unacceptable.

On many occasions, when racism is combined with the threat of gun violence, the outcome is deadly and Black victims are unable to tell their story. This time, the story was caught, at least partially, on video. As reflected in media coverage, Bartlett poses a serious and dangerous threat to the South Florida community, especially to people of color. He must not be allowed to walk away without facing serious repercussion for his actions. The sole charge Bartlett currently faces fails to reflect that Black youth were victimized by his armored, racial animosity.

We offer our continued support to the State Attorney Fernandez Rundle in her stated commitment to filing the appropriate charges and to vigorously prosecute this case to the fullest extent of the law. However, we must stress that in order to fulfill that commitment, it is incumbent upon the City of Miami Police Department and the State Attorney to charge Bartlett with more than just illegally carrying a concealed weapon. Bartlett should face charges that match the egregiousness of his crimes. We urge the State Attorney to charge Bartlett for the multiple criminal acts he committed and that those charges be reclassified under Florida’s hate crime statute.

The mindset that, far too often, treats Black children as threats and disposable must be changed. We are charged with ushering in that change. The Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr. Bar Association therefore requests that its allies inside and outside the legal community join us at the February 20, 2019 scheduled arraignment of Mark Allen Bartlett at 9:30 a.m. inside the Gerstein Justice Building.

Sincerely,

Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr. Bar Association