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**Statement in Response to the
Baltimore Uprising
and the Need to Unite the Social Work Profession
in Addressing the Tragedies Occurring Throughout the Country**

May 4, 2015

The leadership of the National Association of Social Workers, New York City Chapter, including its Committee on Race, Diversity and Intersectionality, its Committee of Social Workers Against Criminalization, and its Task Force of Social Workers of African Descent stand in solidarity with the people of Baltimore and protesters nationally who are demanding structural change within the culture of policing.

We believe it was important that charges were brought against the police officers involved in the death of Freddie Gray, especially at a time when it has been nearly impossible to prosecute the police for violent actions leading to the death of members of the Black community.

The United States is in serious crisis as its communities of color continue to suffer police violence and extrajudicial killings around the country. People are hurting. Their profound pain can only be understood in a historical and ongoing context of oppression and trauma that continues to pervade.

As the recent death of Freddie Gray and countless others led up to the Baltimore Uprising, social workers around the nation can only respond to this collective trauma through deep understanding, compassion, and sensitivity. We have a professional and ethical responsibility to unlearn the racial biases that have been internalized over time, and to understand this complex crisis beyond the individual to the institutionalized and persistent effects of structural racism.

As the death of Freddie Gray has re-ignited the fight against racial profiling, the confrontation of police violence will undoubtedly take many of us out of our comfort zones. It is imperative that we not demonize or criminalize protesters, but understand this situation in a historical context of racism, classism, pain, grief, tremendous loss, and powerlessness.

The uprising in Baltimore has not occurred in an isolated vacuum. Incidents of police brutality have been occurring for decades as its Black community has suffered complete disinvestment, high rates of unemployment, and low performance schools. A growing sense of frustration has inevitably reached a boiling point; not unlike to the situation in Ferguson, Missouri.

According to a report from the Justice Policy Institute and Prison Policy Initiative, the Maryland state budget allocates \$17 million to mass incarceration for just one section of West Baltimore

alone—the neighborhood of Sandtown-Winchester, where Freddie Gray was arrested and fatally injured. This is the larger context in which the Baltimore police operate and enforce their laws and it should not be dismissed. Freddie Gray's death is not likely to be the last.

Social workers may have unique tools to respond to people of color who are most affected. However, it is paramount that our analysis of the problem involve honest reflection within the social work profession. This includes a review our own racial biases and practices, as this is essential for us to serve as change agents towards a larger solution to these persistent tragedies occurring throughout the country.