Recent statements made by the District Attorney have raised significant concerns regarding their implications for the Black community. On July 1, 2024, the DA addressed a prepared statement from local clergy regarding the indictment of Chief Celeste Murphy, suggesting a troubling focus on crime statistics involving Black individuals. Furthermore, remarks recently made to the Hamilton County Pachyderm Club have been interpreted as perpetuating harmful stereotypes about Black youth and neglecting the broader context of violence across the county. While we understand that the gravity of crime in Chattanooga as well as the country is a serious issue, we do give pause to divisive rhetoric used in the article.

District Attorney Coty Wamp's comments are deeply concerning for their broad generalizations and the underlying implications they carry. By framing violent crime as a problem predominantly affecting the Black community within a small radius of downtown Chattanooga, Wamp's statements perpetuate harmful stereotypes about race and crime. Such remarks not only ignore the complex socio-economic factors contributing to violence but also risk alienating communities already vulnerable to systemic inequities.

We identify two critical concerns stemming from the DA's rhetoric:

1. The distinction made between communities by highlighting violence predominantly in downtown Chattanooga, while seemingly dismissing incidents in majority-White areas suggests a potential bias that could contribute to racial profiling.

2. Such statements may set a dangerous precedent that could undermine the legal rights of Black individuals accused of crimes in Hamilton County, impacting their access to fair due process under the law.

DA Wamp’s comments are especially concerning considering the fact she leads an office of Assistant District Attorneys who have wide discretion with decisions on who to prosecute in our county. Implying that crime is isolated to specific areas and populations fosters division and fails to recognize the broader societal responsibility to address these issues. Statements like these from leaders can unintentionally reinforce biases and fuel distrust in a justice system that should serve everyone fairly.

Furthermore, we must push back on the assertion that Black pastors are not doing anything to stop crime. To implicate Black pastors is to implicate the churches we serve which are comprised of community members who work feverously to serve this community. Most pastors work with great rigor in the seen and unseen details of the lives of people. Many of our ministers and churches have ministries and work with other grassroot organizations to provide mental health services, college tours, educational enrichment, soft-skills development, social and fellowship activities, sporting and fine arts activities, not to mention providing the basic necessities of aiding families with food, clothing, and shelter just to name a few. Lastly, we provide what we are called to provide and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which helps to shape the morality, character, and

overall virtues of an individual. As with any other organization, the work that we are called to do is wholistic in nature and requires a community effort.

We would urge the DA's office to work collaboratively with not only Black pastors, but all pastors as well as community leaders and local organizations to develop crime prevention strategies. We call upon the office to put money behind mentoring, job training, restorative justice programs, and mental health services that make a long-term impact.

Lastly, we would like to reaffirm that we have a shared goal of making Chattanooga a safer place for everyone, regardless of race, creed, color, or ethnic origin. Our job as leaders in our community is to bring communities together to address crime while at the same time emphasizing that crime prevention is everyone's responsibility. Our call as a community is to address those issues not just on the surface but the root causes of crime through justice, equity, and partnership. It is our hope to do this as One Chattanooga and One Hamilton County.

Signed,
Black Clergy and Black Community Members