

Statement on Next Steps of Our Movement
August 14, 2020

We, the People's Plaza, have occupied Ida B. Wells Plaza at the Tennessee State Capitol building since June 12, 2020. Yesterday, August 13, 2020 marked 62 days of our protest. Our protest started in tandem with movements across the world that demanded the recognition that Black Lives Matter. We have continued to amplify this message and to shine the light of truth upon police brutality.

At the start of this protest, we had four demands: 1) defund the police, 2) demilitarize the police, 3) remove Confederate symbols across the state and 4) fire Metro Nashville Police Chief Steve Anderson. Two of our short-term goals of this protest were to remove the Nathan Bedford Forrest bust from the State Capitol building and to meet with Governor Bill Lee to discuss systemic racism in Tennessee.

We have made enormous progress. Within the first two weeks of our protest, MNPD Chief Anderson announced his resignation. Although Governor Bill Lee has refused to speak with us, showing his disdain and disregard for his constituents, we know he has felt the pressure of our protest. He called a meeting of the State Capitol Commission to vote on removing the NBF bust from the State Capitol building. This vote passed and will now be reviewed by the Tennessee Historical Commission, where we continue to apply pressure.

We know we have made progress because of the backlash we have received during our protest. Gov. Lee, while refusing to meet with us, called a special session of the state legislature, where anti-protest bill HB8005 was passed. These bills were written in direct response to our occupation and in reaction to the momentum our movement has gained. Gov. Lee and the state legislature are afraid of the power of the people, but that will not stop us.

As we look toward the future of our movement, we recognize that many of our goals will take continued work. We have built an amazing coalition of young people who are eager to start organizing in a more sustainable way. After careful reflection and consideration and with our long-term goals in mind, we have made the decision to transition our protest into a more sustainable format.

We will no longer occupy the Plaza 24/7, but we will continue to keep fighting and organizing for our goals. We are not leaving in fear of these unjust, unconstitutional and undemocratic laws. Rather, we recognize that our work takes a variety of approaches and tactics.

We want to thank everyone who has been a part of the Plaza over the last 62 days. We could not have done this work without the donations, support and generosity of the Tennessee community and beyond. We hope to continue our community-building work and to expand our network of friends and allies.

We will continue to collaborate and organize for racial justice – specifically the defunding and demilitarization of the police and the removal of Confederate symbols. We will continue to organize direct actions at Ida B. Wells Plaza and events that cater to our community and our work of the last 62 days.

Thank you again, and remember: the Plaza belongs to the people.

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