



June 3, 2020

Public Information Officer, we see you.

If memory serves me correctly, at last year's conference the hashtag #PIOsMatter was born. Pairing those two simple words made such an impactful statement. I cannot recall a time when it resonated more profoundly than it does today. You do matter. Now more than ever.

As government communicators and public information officers on the front lines of a nation with an increasingly challenging climate, you all continue to serve your organizations, your communities, and the field of public information with integrity, professionalism, and dedication. You meet adversity after adversity and work tirelessly to overcome. Sometimes this requires you to spend long hours away from your families and friends. Some of you even experience the added element of risking your life or having threats against your life simply because of the uniform you wear or the role you play in light of current events. None of this is easy, but you do not complain. You do what you must do. You push through.

What happened to George Floyd was not okay. Major Cities Chiefs Association describes his death as "by any measure of professional policing unnecessary, avoidable, and criminal." I think we can all agree. As a result of this horrific injustice, our nation is hurting, mad, fearful, resentful, confrontational, radical, sorrowful, and the list of emotions go on and on.

Our community members are demanding change; some peacefully and others through anarchy and complete destruction. We never know what each new day holds. Will there be another protest? Will it be peaceful? Will our town be destroyed? What do we say before, during, after? HOW do we say it?

On a personal level, we watch our family members, colleagues, friends, and even strangers suffer by either words or actions. Our law enforcement friends. Our friends of color. Our law enforcement friends of color. Words hurt. Actions hurt. Lack of action hurts.

We cannot hide from it. We're embedded. We're engaged in social media, and those social media posts can be ruthless. We're passionate about what we do and take things personally, though we try our very best not to. I once had an instructor offer the best piece of advice I've ever received, "Listen for understanding, not agreement." Easier said than done.

I say all this to say...#PIOsMatter. You matter. You not only matter to your communities, but you matter to us. We stand with you. We walk with you. We are here for you. This load is not for you to carry alone. We are a diverse group by every imaginable definition, and our strength is magnified because of that diversity. If you feel overwhelmed, please do not hesitate to reach out to your colleagues within our amazing organization. We are a family; a family that will always build one another up.

May you continue to stay safe and resilient,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ashley McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ashley McDonald
NIOA President