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From: The Undersigned Black-led-and-serving Organizations

*An Open Letter to Philanthropy and Government Leaders: Equity Meets Its Moment*

Just three weeks into research on the myriad ways in which the novel coronavirus is devastating communities across this country a story is emerging that is not novel: Black people are dying at disproportionate rates across the country. At this early stage in the U.S. COVID-19 crisis, the stark racial disparity in death rates is linked to disparities in underlying health and economic conditions that increase the likelihood of death as a result of COVID-19. These health conditions—our conditions—are rooted in a history of being denied access to quality food, medical treatment, and the physiological stress of intergenerational racial terror.

As this epidemiological crisis continues, you should expect to hear stories suggesting that even when controlling for underlying health conditions, Black people are still dying from COVID-19 at disproportionate rates. Hidden in the statistics are questions none of us can ignore: how are Black people treated by nurses and physicians when seeking treatment for symptoms of COVID-19? How does race factor into the question of who lives or dies?

You should also expect to hear stories about Black people, particularly poor Black people, bearing the brunt of the severe economic dislocation caused by this pandemic. Yet, as funders and government leaders, you should not wait until these stories hit the front pages of our leading newspapers. You know the history. You know the *right now*. You should act immediately to robustly support those community-based organizations that empower Black Californians to both survive and challenge inequitable conditions.

In 2011, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs reported in its Annual State of the Sector Report that 39% of nonprofit organizations that disbanded between 2002—2011 in LA County served neighborhoods where more than 20% of the population lived in poverty and more than 40% of the residents were African American.

Data published by the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity in 2017 revealed the proportion of annual grant money for African Americans decreased by 4.3% between 2005-2014, the highest decrease of any POC group over the same time period.

In its 2018 report, *The Racial Wealth Gap*, the California Budget and Policy Center detailed how government-sponsored policies and discriminatory practices have driven the racial wealth gap, where in 2014, the median value of liquid assets for white households in Los Angeles was \$110,000, compared to \$200 for US-born black households.

That same year, the LA County Department of Public Health Center for Health Equity published its action plan for birth equity, in which racism and its impact on life outcomes was the clear and determinant public health factor impacting Black infant and maternal death.

In 2019, the LA Homeless Service Authority declared in its groundbreaking report on Black people and homelessness: *Structural racism, discrimination, and unconscious bias in housing*,

*employment, criminal justice, and child welfare policies have led to overrepresentation of Black people experiencing houselessness.*

Data is clear: racial injustice continues to serve as a destructive force in society, undermining our economy, humanity and self-professed values of liberty and justice for all.

As Black-led-and-serving organizations, we are on the frontlines. We live the truth of inequity: that Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, and indeed, the nation, have historical legacies rooted in institutional and systemic racism; that our communities have been harmed by oppression and neglect.

Progress on Black equity and racial justice must be part of any forward movement in the United States, and it will only be achieved when philanthropic investments, public policies, and institutional practices boldly confront racial injustice.

Now is the time to double and triple down on eradicating it. Now is when equity gets put to the test. And now is the time to make good on your word: equity matters.

**This begins with a commitment to invest in Black community organizations.**

Why? Because Black communities continue to be the canary in America's social and economic mine. From poor performing schools to predatory lending practices, our community experiences the pain first. Our communities have had to withstand the unnecessary loss of lives due to failed public policies and racial bigotry. At the same time, we are the pioneers of social justice resistance and transformative innovation. When reflecting on anti-terror lynching movements of the NAACP to the Black Panther Party's free lunch and clinic programs to LA CAN's COVID-19 sanitation centers in Skid Row, our community's first responders have been leading the way in showing government and NGOs alike how to care for the needs of people rather than discard the people all together. We are more than CBOs: we are family. Some of us have lost members of our natural family to COVID-19 while coming to the aid of our community families. That is why we cannot be silent in this moment.

The one thing you, as philanthropic and government leaders can control in this crisis, is how we will be better when it's over.

As funders and public officials, we call on you to act with the fierce urgency of now. We call on you to:

- Use your voice and public platform to speak about systemic harm to Black people and advocate for equity-based investments
- Commit to rigorously tracking the flow of dollars from your institution to Black-led-and-serving organizations
- Increase investments in Black CBOs by at least 25%, in line with the recommendations made in 2017 by the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE)
- Fully fund public departments and commissions tasked with anti-discrimination and racial equity enforcement (e.g., Office of Racial Equity, Civil and Human Rights Ordinance, Equity and Targeted Student Achievement, Perinatal Equity Initiative/Black Infant Health, among others)
- Take an institution-and-infrastructure-building approach to funding nonprofits, recognizing strong Black-led institutions, alliances, coalitions, groups and individuals are more important than ever.



Our collective work is both timeless and urgent. Disrupting systemic oppression cannot wait, nor can our response be colorblind or race neutral when the outcomes are not. Lives are at stake.

We **can** design an equitable recovery. For the sake of our shared humanity, we must.

In community,

Executive Directors (signed below)

*The undersigned organizations are part of the Black Equity Initiative (BEI) and the African American Infant and Maternal Mortality (AAIMM) Initiative. Black executive directors denoted by \*.*

*Black Equity Initiative*

*Susan Burton\**, A New Way of Life Re-Entry Project

*John Kim*, Advancement Project California

*Sam Lewis\**, Anti-Recidivism Coalition

*Janette Robinson Flint\**, Black Women for Wellness

*Dina Walker\**, BLU Educational Foundation—San Bernardino

*Charisse Bremond Weaver\**, Brotherhood Crusade

*Mary Sutton*, Collective REMAKE

*Alberto Retana*, Community Coalition (CoCo)

*Jessica Ellis*, Centinela Youth Services

*Rev. Sam Casey\**, Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE)—San Bernardino

*Jeffery Wallace\**, LeadersUp

*Janel Baily\** and *LaTonya Harris\**, Los Angeles Black Worker Center

*Pete White\**, Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN)

*Areva Martin\**, Special Needs Network

*Gloria Walton\**, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)

*Tremaine Mitchell\**, Youth Action Project—San Bernardino

*African American Infant and Maternal Mortality (AAIMM) Initiative*

*Michelle Fluke*, Antelope Valley Partners for Health

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*Sonya Young Aadam\**, California Black Women's Health Project

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*Kimberly Durdin\** and *Allegra Hill\**, KindredSpaceLA and Birthing People Foundation