



Statement by PHIMC President and CEO Karen A. Reitan

Friends:

On May 14, we watched the jarring images of white men with automatic weapons inside the Michigan State Capitol, nose to nose yelling at police with no response or consequence. Not two weeks later, we watched horrifying video of George Floyd, a black man, being murdered by a police officer kneeling on his neck in front of a crowd of onlookers begging him to stop. Three additional officers looked on and did nothing. This weekend, we watched thousands take to the streets calling for justice with a righteous rage that began 400 years ago when the first Africans were stolen from their homes and brought here as slaves.

That racism and oppression of people of color, particularly black people, are a central component of American life cannot be disputed. It is imbedded in the United States at all levels - personal, professional, legal, spiritual - no matter where you turn, racism and oppression are there. The burden of dismantling the racist infrastructure of our country lies squarely with white people. We created this problem when we chose this path and it is ours to own and to change. We will never be the America we think we are until this happens.

Racism is a public health crisis. That cannot be denied. Study after study documents the disproportionate burden of chronic and infectious diseases among people of color. The chronic stress of being black in America, particularly among women, has been shown to contribute to heart disease, hypertension, and premature death. In Chicago's wealthy and predominately white Streeterville community, residents live to be 90 on average, while nine miles south, in Chicago's impoverished and predominately black Englewood community, residents live only to 60. Everywhere we look, the connection between racism and poor health is clear.

Like many of you, the board and staff of PHIMC hope that this will be a galvanizing moment for the United States as it lays bare the impact of deliberately institutionalized racism. Our hearts are broken for the family of George Floyd and all the families who have lost their sons and daughters at the hands of police. Our blood boils at the injustice of white women calling the police when black people are bird watching, jogging, picnicking, selling lemonade, walking, or engaging in the panoply of activities that comprise daily life. Our souls cry out for a national sea change that transforms our structures of injustice and lays a new foundation for equity.

Black Lives Matter. Black lives are cherished at PHIMC. As a staff, we met to talk about the events of the last week - to share our grief and fear, to offer support and love, and to talk about how we as individuals and PHIMC as an institution will work for change. We've compiled a list of ideas and resources. These are things we can do today to make a difference and things we can do over time to better understand and then begin to dismantle the institutions of oppression in our nation. This is just our list, one that will grow and change. There are many others. Like you, we are trying to find our way to justice.

Sincerely,

Karen A. Reitan
President & CEO

Tools and Resources

- [Self-Care Tips for Black People Who Are Struggling With This Very Painful Week](#) by Rachel Miller on Vice
- [Information on how we all can take action to combat systemic racism in the United States](#) from Anti-Racism Project
- [75 things white people can do for racial justice](#), by Corinne Shutack on Medium
- [Resources for Talking About Race, Racism, and Racialized Violence with Kids](#) from Center for Racial Justice in Education
- [Talking About Race](#), tools and guidance from National Museum of African American History and Culture

Support Frontline Organizations

Please also consider donations to some of the organizations working on the frontlines:

- [Brave Space Alliance](#) set-up a Crisis Pantry program to run the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic in Chicago and now also needs food, medical supplies, and masks.
- [Chicago Freedom School](#), in its support of youth leaders, both transported and housed young people stranded downtown when Chicago Transit Authority was closed and curfew was established during protest.
- [My Block My Hood My City](#) is looking for volunteers to help repair businesses damaged this weekend on Chicago's South Side.
- Donate to [Community Bail funds](#)

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