



Race Matters
for Juvenile Justice



*Media
Release*

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Standing Together For Justice

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (June 4, 2020) – *This Joint Statement is offered in partnership with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations, City of Charlotte Office of Equity, Mobility and Immigrant Integration, Mecklenburg County Office of Equity and Inclusion, Community Building Initiative, and Race Matters for Juvenile Justice.*

To date, 2020 has been a very difficult year for our country and those of us who call Charlotte-Mecklenburg home. Our lives have changed in ways we could have hardly imagined when the year began. Now, in the midst of dealing with the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 and the inequities it has illuminated, a virus that has plagued black and brown communities for over 400 years has proved yet again that it can be just as damaging to one's livelihood - discrimination, white supremacy and systematic racism. The ongoing intolerance against Black people has manifested itself in violent acts such as lynchings. With the death of George Floyd due to the actions and inactions of law enforcement, it now affirms what has long been known; namely, that racism and injustice continue to persist throughout our community and within our institutions.

Anger, frustration and pain are being expressed across the country and here in our community through protests and public demonstrations. It is critical that spaces be created to lawfully protest conditions such as injustice, police brutality, racism and other inequities that create hardship for members of our community. The motivating factor behind this form of expression is the desire for people to be heard, for leaders to listen, engage with the community, build solutions together and then put forth a plan to respond. We cannot ignore the voices and calls for action to address these systemic issues. We must recognize that violence during these protests will only cause further distraction. The number of peaceful protests shows how passionate our community is about change. We cannot allow the tumultuous actions of a few to overshadow the truth that we have a tremendous amount of work to do to better serve all members of our community. In order for all lives to truly matter, the lives of black and brown people must matter as well.

Collectively, we must be intentional about how we move towards healing as a community and a nation. In the past, we have allowed tough issues around race and injustice to sink back into our personal and community's ground - like toxic waste - only to have the discord, pain and anger resurface with the next crisis. We rush to get back to "normal" without acknowledging that what many deem "normal" has been fairer for some than others and has been a significant part of the problem. It will take a new normal that examines root causes to create true and lasting change.

We are reminded of a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when speaking about the "Beloved Community," a society he envisioned that is based on justice, fairness and a compassion for one another. Dr. King stated, *"Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives."* Action is necessary to stop our "bleeding" – racism, poverty, tribalism, divisive identity politics, injustice, inequity, implicit bias, apathy and a lack of trust between communities of color and the police sworn to protect them. It is indeed long-term and challenging work, but it must be our collective focus if true healing is to begin.

As a community, we must come together, share our pain, be honest with one another, acknowledge the systems that advantage some and disadvantage others and commit to being active in crafting and advocating for solutions.

Many wonder what actionable steps can be taken to begin this process. We want to hear from you, and frankly it is our responsibility that you be heard. Over the coming months, we will be hosting community conversations to listen to one another, discuss work currently being done to address these issues and partner within the community to explore solution-oriented ideas.

We know our community is hurting, and we know that the trauma is deeply rooted. We also know the strength and power we have when we work together. This is not a time for any of us to sit on the sidelines but rather a time for reflection, response and involvement to make our community a place where everyone has an equitable opportunity to flourish and breathe.

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