



The Voice of the Human Services Community

June 4, 2020

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Executive Director

Michelle Jackson

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio:

As those who work every day to better the lives of all New Yorkers, with centuries of experience working in our communities, the human services sector is deeply disturbed by the government's response to protests and to the racist policies leading up to them. We know what is needed now is not an increased and heavily militarized police presence and damaging curfew, it is making sure there is equitable access to housing, transportation, food, good-paying jobs, worker protections, youth programming, and education. Unfortunately, we speak at this moment about more immediate crises in the way our own government and police – those who should stand with us in building up New York – are mishandling the response to protests and putting many in jeopardy.

Our sector is in solidarity with Black activists and organizers across New York and the entire United States protesting in response to police brutality and structural anti-Black violence and discrimination. The City and State must take immediate actions to demonstrate that they, like us, want to achieve real equity and stand with us to rebuild New York.

- **Remove the oppressive and ill-planned curfew.** New York City's curfew was enacted with limited guidance for those essential workers continuing to work on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic through the curfew and to protect homeless New Yorkers. This directly impacts the access to services in Black communities who have been most impacted by COVID-19 and the ability of our workers to safely do their jobs. The curfew was enacted hastily and without clear instructions, leaving employers scrambling to protect workers out in the field, and with the real worry that those out after curfew will be harassed. Human services workers - a majority of whom are women of color - are already paid poverty wages under government contracts to be on the frontlines of the pandemic and put themselves and their families at risk. New York needs to finally start providing these workers with PPE and incentive pay, not

actively compounding their trauma and making their jobs harder.

- **Fully clear the records of all New Yorkers who are arrested for exercising their First Amendment rights or violating the poorly executed curfew.** New Yorkers peacefully exercising their rights to protest police misconduct and structural racism should not be labeled as criminals. Discrimination based on having a record already disproportionately impacts the Black community due to the very structural racism those out on the streets are protesting. Many human services workers, who are desperately needed in the field, cannot work for programs with an arrest record. Clearing these records is a powerful and necessary step towards breaking the cycle of oppression.
- **Immediately stop the use of tear gas which is a lethal weapon during COVID-19.** The use of weapons that restrict breathing during a pandemic that impacts the respiratory system is completely unethical—it impacts the lungs and makes those who are subjected to it more vulnerable to COVID-19 and drastically increases the transmission of COVID-19 by causing people to cough, take off/lose their face masks, and touch their eyes and face. Even if we were not in the middle of combating a fast-spreading respiratory-based virus with no cure, tear gas has been proven to cause chemical burns to the skin, corneal abrasions, and long-lasting or even permanent lung injury. Propelled canisters also cause skull and bone fractures.

The sector is on the frontlines of fighting inequality, racism, and poverty every day. Government policies have made our jobs more difficult, and we will continue to push for reforms so that we can better serve communities. At this moment of real crisis, we need true leadership, compassion, and thoughtfulness, and cannot stand by as we see failure after failure compound this public health crisis and reckoning of systemic racial inequity.

These steps are only the beginning. The time to act is now.

Sincerely,



Michelle Jackson
Executive Director

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cc: Members of the New York State Senate
Members of the New York State Assembly
Members of the New York City Council