



Black Lives Matter

Dear colleague,

We had to close 50 East State Street today because of looting last night after two peaceful protests in Trenton over the weekend. Staff from the State Central Registry were moved for safety purposes and the building was closed to all other workers.

Around the state and the country, communities are struggling to process the murder of George Floyd by police in Minnesota. While the officer directly involved in that case has been arrested, the other officers that stood by, doing nothing, were not. People are angry.

This deadly assault and many others like it, including those of Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, Terence Crutcher, Philando Castile, Michael Brown, etc. have caused overwhelming grief. Racist confrontations by white people against people running, bird watching, napping in a dorm, waiting at Starbucks, driving, barbecuing and many more activities “while black” have compounded the hurt and anger.

Over half a century ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, *“A riot is the language of the unheard. And what has America failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the (black) poor has worsened...It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about the...status quo than about justice, equality and humanity...As long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again.”*

Are we listening? In the business of child welfare, we know that generational trauma is real and it negatively impacts all facets of life – employment, health, and emotional, mental and family wellness. There is no greater trauma for black families than the feeling of being targeted and victimized, unjustly; no greater fear than that which they have for their black children. This isn’t just from 400 years of legalized slavery and discrimination. Offenses against the black community are ongoing.

We’ve seen it in our own removal and permanency data. Black families are separated more frequently than white families and they endure longer periods before permanency. Black children are in residential treatment at much higher rates than their white counterparts. Hundreds of years of institutionalized and structural racism have been embedded in policies and rules in housing, education, social services, law enforcement and the courts that create barriers for black families, disproportionately. The time is long past due for change.

At DCF, we have been examining racial disparity county by county through ChildStat. We have worked on revisions to policies regarding background checks for kinship caregivers, and we made steady

progress in reducing the use of family separation as a tool of this state's child protection system. These are important steps, but you know, and we know, that there is much more work to be done.

That's why we have an Office of Family Voice so that we can hear from people who have previously been unheard. Our parent and youth councils are sharing in ways they have never been asked to before. We're listening. As you know, DCF has named race equity as one of our core principles. We condemn racial bias in all its forms. We believe that black lives matter: black staff, black colleagues, black children and families. This is not to the exclusion of other races, but because right now and for hundreds of years, black lives have been marginalized and demoralized. This inequity must be made right.

The Race Equity Steering Committee continues to take on this important, but complicated and layered task. They are studying the data and our policies. They are researching best practices and engaging experts in the field. The work is daunting, but necessary and the members are committed to making a difference. They are listening.

We understand that many staff are feeling the emotional impacts of the civil unrest and may need to take time off or to talk with someone. Please work with your supervisors to schedule any benefit time for this purpose or you may want to call your health insurance carrier about care options. There are also hotlines and helplines that you can call for support. The Mental Health Cares' phone number is 1-866-202-4357. You can text NJ to 741741 for one-one counseling.

In addition, The Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture yesterday launched [Talking About Race](#), a new online portal designed to help individuals, families, and communities talk about racism, racial identity and the way these forces shape every aspect of society, from the economy and politics to the broader American culture. And, on June 3rd at noon, New Jersey's Attorney General is hosting a [Virtual Town Hall-Let's Talk About It: Building Police-Community Trust Across New Jersey](#). These are two good opportunities to learn more and do more to eradicate racism.

DCF alone can't fix what's happening in communities across America, but we can be the change we want to see in New Jersey. Undoing systemic racism is hard work and it is work we need to choose to do, every day. As the leadership team of this Department, we commit to choosing that work.

<i>Christine Beyer</i>	<i>Doris Windle</i>	<i>Katie Stoehr</i>
<i>Bonny Fraser</i>	<i>Carmen Diaz-Petti</i>	<i>Mollie Greene</i>
<i>Sanford Starr</i>	<i>Aubrey Powers</i>	<i>Jessica Trombetta</i>
<i>Brian Ross</i>	<i>Nicole Brossoie</i>	<i>Anna Martinez</i>
<i>Linda Dobron</i>	<i>Steve Dodson</i>	<i>Nancy Gagliano</i>
<i>Suzanne Alvino</i>		<i>Linda Holland</i>