

Black Lives Matter: Our Commitment to Equity and Racial Justice
San Francisco Human Services Network
June 2020

The San Francisco Human Services Network stands in solidarity with Black Lives Matter in its struggle against racism, injustice, oppression and violence. We commit ourselves to speaking out against institutionalized racism, and supporting significant and lasting change in institutional systems that perpetuate social and economic inequity. We advocate for defunding the police and reinvesting those funds into community-based responses to homelessness, mental health, poverty and restorative justice. We challenge ourselves to expand our missions beyond important safety net services to incorporate and advance the empowerment and inclusion of diverse, low-income City residents.

As we mourn the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and countless others, we must seize this moment to focus on the failure of our institutions to address systemic racism and to remedy centuries of historic inequality and white supremacy, both nationally and close to home. We must examine all aspects of our economic, health, criminal justice, education, employment and political systems to eliminate the disparities that damage communities and devalue individuals based on the color of their skin. Our focus must extend to identifying and dismantling systemic racism and white privilege within the systems and structures of our own organizations and sector.

Our country's long overdue attention to racial justice coincides with the coronavirus pandemic and its ensuing consequences on our economy, with disproportionate impacts on African American and Latinx, poor, homeless, underserved and vulnerable populations. These twin crises have exacerbated the disparities that existed long before the pandemic. Even in progressive San Francisco, Black and African American residents experience poverty at three times the average rate (30.4% compared to 10% in 2018), and face homelessness at six times their representation in the general population (37% of homeless individuals compared to 6% of the population in 2019).

We must reprioritize our City budget to invest in economic justice, reform our criminal justice systems, defund the police, take police out of our schools, reimagine the role of law enforcement in addressing homelessness, mental illness, drug addiction and conflict resolution, and bring a new vision of public safety to all residents of our City.

The current uprising for racial justice that began with senseless Black deaths at the hands of police has led to a much broader movement to ensure the dignity, power and well-being of Black lives. As human service nonprofits, we share a unique role and responsibility to those we serve, and we align ourselves with communities of color and low-income communities. However, we must challenge ourselves daily, as both organizations and individuals, to go beyond the provision of culturally competent safety net services, and look deeply within at how our sector can join the fight for both immediate and long-term change. We must listen to and learn from people of color, and support our diverse clients and staff members in building their leadership skills. We must continue pushing for adequate funding to raise the wages of our nonprofit workers, whose ethnic diversity often closely resembles that of our clients. Most important, we must join the calls of Black Lives Matter movement leaders for advocacy, and ask how we can support their fight for equity and justice.