

An Equitable Recovery for California and the Nation

We are business, labor, non-profit and philanthropic leaders and elected officials from across California, tasked by Governor Gavin Newsom with charting a path toward economic recovery from COVID-19. We write this letter as a collective acknowledgement that there can be no recovery until the state and the nation value Black lives.

The triple catastrophes we are facing – the pandemic, massive unemployment, and racism in policing – disproportionately fall upon Black and Latinx people. Centuries-old, persistent, intolerable injustice against Black Americans has set conditions of discrimination and exclusion for other people of color. This must change if California and the nation are to find peace, resilience and renewal.

The heartbreaking and outrageous events of the past three months have made clear that structural racism has made our pandemic deadlier. It has compelled millions of people – disproportionately people of color – to keep society functioning, at low-wage jobs and too often without health insurance, sick leave or protective gear. It has consigned millions more to struggle in poverty, with only a threadbare safety net. And racism has quite literally killed George Floyd and so many others.

As people across our nation stand up for justice, we as business and civic leaders recognize that taking a stand against racism is not just a moral imperative for our collective future, but an economic one. The discrimination inflicted upon Black Americans has entrenched discrimination that harms other people of color – leaving them, and our entire economy, vulnerable to a shock like the COVID-19 crisis.

While California is the world's fifth-largest economy, our rising tide has not lifted all boats. We are simultaneously the richest and poorest state. In California, working people of color are over three times more likely than White workers to live in poverty. Income gaps persist across lines of ethnicity, gender and ability. Regional divisions also exclude entire communities. In 2016, median household income in Santa Clara County was more than double that in Fresno and Kern Counties.

The COVID crisis laid bare the fragility of our economy and the lives of those excluded from it. With a disproportionate number of low-wage jobs created since the last recession, and those jobs disproportionately held by people of color and women, too many lacked sufficient income and assets to weather the economic storm; in addition, they faced greater exposure to the virus due to the high-contact nature of their essential jobs. These vulnerabilities further

complicate the recovery from COVID-19, as 80 percent of the jobs at risk right now are held by workers with less than a bachelor's degree.

But recovering from COVID-19 also presents an opportunity to re-imagine our society and economy by striking out against injustice. We declare with one voice that this pattern of racial inequality must stop now *and* that the results of our attempt to redress the past and correct the present will manifest in this generation.

To that end, since the inception of our Task Force, we have committed to principles that will guide our work to rebuild our economy: put people first, explicitly address racial and ethnic discrimination and disparities, expand opportunity in places facing extreme poverty and inequality, and prioritize shared prosperity and economic inclusion.

Informed by these principles, business and civic leaders in California can pledge to:

- Lead on racial equity in our businesses and institutions, pointing to the corrosive impact of racism and encouraging conversations and actions among our employees and colleagues;
- Recover from the COVID-19 recession by working to create jobs that are inclusive, sustainable and equitable, building ladders of opportunity for Californians who have been locked out of our state's prosperity;
- Commit to a robust, equitable educational system in which learners of all ages can succeed, including closing the digital divide and supports for parents furthering their education;
- Work with the Governor's Office and in our own institutions to develop policies that can correct the past and improve the future, including supporting small businesses owned by and operating in communities of color, targeting education and training to those usually left behind, prioritizing environmental-justice principles, and closing the racial wealth gap;
- Continue to make transparent and address the racial disparities of COVID-19, by working with the Governor's Office to provide more equitable access to PPE in the workplace, testing in communities of color and access to health care for prevention and treatment.

- Address the long-term housing crisis in California with a full understanding of the racially disparate patterns of homeownership, rent burden and homelessness;
- Think long-term by collaborating with the Governor's Office and in our own organizations to design jobs programs for California's diverse youth so that their futures are not permanently derailed by coming of age in a recession.

California cannot do it alone, but we can lead. This Task Force cannot do it all, but we can leverage our experience, commitment and resolve to reimagine and restructure our economy. And while we as individual leaders understand the magnitude of the work ahead, we believe that together, we can forge a more inclusive, more prosperous and more just Golden State.

Sincerely,

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