

*“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” -Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The COVID pandemic has revealed some stark inequities in our black and brown communities and their profoundly tragic consequences, with African Americans being twice as likely to suffer the most devastating outcomes of the virus. COVID-19 feeds off of chronic illnesses that are prevalent in our communities, including diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma and obesity. Note: These are the very communities labeled as “Environmental Justice” communities, because of the disproportionate burdens they suffer. And now they suffer disproportionately from the virus. Our communities are often the most overcrowded, our air the most polluted, our jobs among the lowest paid, and as it turns out, among the most essential. There are no work-from-home privileges for many of us, and we commute on crowded, and until recently, unsanitized trains and buses. But as the highly contagious virus rips across all communities it has become painfully clear...our interests are all connected. Black and brown lives **do** matter. We are the ER doctors and the ICU nurses. We are the orderlies and the morgue attendants, and many of the most vulnerable in our communities provide the frontline essential services that have kept our country from dissolving into chaos. We pack the groceries on the shelves and process the online shopping lists. We deliver the mail and package the meat. In fact, Black people have been the “essential workers” in America since the colonial period in the early 1600’s. So as we re-imagine our new normal in this age of COVID, we are obligated to shine a light and mitigate the inequities in housing, education, healthcare, policing and environment that ultimately threaten us all. **We must act now**; because once we find our way out of this virus, we must be smart enough to expect that the next one is not far away.

*“There can be no peace as long as there is grinding poverty, social injustice, inequality, oppression, environmental degradation, and as long as the weak and small continue to be trodden by the mighty and powerful.”*

*--Tenzin Gyatso, The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama*

As if a deadly virus were not enough, the murder of George Floyd compels us to further face our nation’s deepest inequities and contradictions and to test the most basic principles of our democracy. George Floyd became one more of a long list of those murdered by the very people who are supposed to protect us. **Our collective anger is a reflection of our sadness and frustration, of our despair that a brand of lynching is still with us, but it is also a hopeful sign.** The diversity of those marching in the streets across this nation in protest is a sign that large numbers of people from all walks of life are realizing that the injustices perpetrated against black and brown people must stop and must stop now,

not “some day.” It is a living testimony that the toughest lessons learned in the pandemic and the calls for justice in the streets across this country are here to stay. The spontaneous, vast and diverse groups of protesters send a powerful message: **Injustice against any one of us is an injustice against us all.**

*“The answer to injustice is not to silence the critic but to end the injustice.”*

--Paul Robeson

The Eastern Queens Alliance joins with all the brave warriors who have been emboldened to speak up and speak out. We applaud the passion and courage of all who cope with a deadly pandemic, but who stare down the face of police brutality embedded in law enforcement systems across this country fueled by varying degrees of explicit and implicit bias and racism. We understand, as Desmond Tutu stated years ago during Apartheid, *“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”* We advocate for the continued highlighting and underscoring of the issues, successful outcomes and resolutions in this very focused mission--equal justice for all peoples regardless of race, color, creed. As importantly, we pledge to actively work with all of our elected officials and governmental entities to bring about the police reform necessary for our communities and across this nation.

*“And I, for one, will join in with anyone--I don't care what color you are--as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth.”*

--Malcolm X

We are all in this together. Let us continue to speak truth that is informed by an understanding that the health and well-being of each and every one of us is truly the concern of us all. And let us take a vow that we, as a people, will always rise up in loud and righteous indignation when justice fails, no matter the economic cost. Where there is no justice, we must not be silent. **No justice, no peace.**

Eastern Queens Alliance, Inc.