

June 4, 2020

Dear Rochester Black Agenda:

As an agency that has worked for decades to end violence, we grieve over the brutal killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others. These racist actions are reprehensible and have no place in our society.

Willow Domestic Violence Center stands in support of the Rochester Black Agenda declaration that racism is a public health issue. Racism endangers Black lives. There is an immense body of research that demonstrates racism as a social determinant of health.

We recognize that racism is not new and has plagued our country for hundreds of years. We also recognize that we must take direct anti-racist actions in partnership and solidarity with the Rochester Black Agenda to dismantle structural racism and address disparities in access and resources. The underlying power structures that perpetuate racism are mirrored and amplified in the experience of survivors of domestic violence. As a domestic violence service provider serving over 7,000 survivors each year, Willow Center recognizes the intersection of racism, domestic violence and public health. We are committed to confronting discrimination and injustice.

Recent events have underscored the need to delve deeper into equity and inclusion at Willow Center. – We have been engaged in values-based dialogue, addressing inclusion as one of our core values and revising our policies, procedures and practices with a lens of equity and trauma-informed principles. Yet we can and must do more.

If we've learned anything from the amplified voices this past weekend, it is that now is the time to do more. To listen harder. To reflect on ways structural racism and the abuse of power impacts Willow – our staff, our clients, and our work in this community. To center the voices of people of color. To stand together against racism. To be actively anti-racist.

In March, at the beginning of the State of Emergency, Willow Center revised our emergency policy to redefine 'essential staff' as any staff who are skilled to provide coverage for 'essential services' so that the burden of working onsite through the pandemic was not carried by our front-line shelter staff alone, many of whom are people of color. Our recruitment practices for senior leadership positions are focused

on engaging candidates of color. Willow Center has brought in a Consultant on Equity and Diversity to guide our efforts and ensure that every staff member and every survivor feels safe and welcome at Willow. We will be launching a Board Task Force on Equity and Diversity to include members of the Black community and understand more fully what actions will drive real change. We will listen – more – to our staff and the families we serve, and amplify Black voices in driving change toward a more equitable and just future.

We are committed to rooting out racism and hate from our systems and circles of influence. We will work tirelessly towards a vision of a safe and inclusive community where everyone will have equal access to resources and can live their lives free of intimidation and coercion.

This rebuilding demands deep changes in our culture, including more access and better services especially for survivors of color to help our community recover from the trauma of the violence and bias that are all around us.

We stand with the Black Lives Matter movement, the Rochester Black Agenda, and our resilient community against structural racism and for the promise of peace and justice for all.

In partnership,



Meaghan de Chateauvieux
President & CEO