



To: City of Portland Bureau Directors
From: Portland City African American Network Leadership
Re: Continued Support for Black Employees

Dear Director,

This year has been one of the most challenging and opportunistic years in the history of Portland. Covid-19 caused many businesses to close their doors, some permanently. Portland residents were then restricted from traveling as freely as before, triggering anxiety, fear, depression, and feelings of isolation within the community. The pandemic's financial impact added additional pressure on families by reducing or eliminating income and caused a strain on Oregon's Employment department, resulting in delays with processing and payment of unemployment claims; many of which are still outstanding. Financially speaking, the City itself faces unplanned revenue shortages which required employees at all levels to furlough hours and pay to help preserve coworkers' jobs. It was clear that 2020 stood out as a year where, much like the rest of the world, the City of Portland needed to focus on maintaining a sense of calm, provide encouragement that this crisis would pass, and as a governmental agency do everything in its power to support those most at risk of displacement. Then on May 25th, one man died, and the lid of the pressure cooker blew off. The issue was not who this man was, but who he represents. It wasn't what he was known for, for had it not been for this moment, he may never have been known. It wasn't that he died, but how and by who's hand. It wasn't that it happened, but that it was recorded and witnessed millions of times. It was because the world, including Portland, could see that despite similar stories being told and experienced many times over, the narrative moved from anecdotal to fact.

To be certain, this was not the first time that an African American was killed by police unjustly. In fact, it is not even the first time something like this had been recorded. What some call statistical anomalies of police killing Black men, members of the African American community know the experience and threat as statistical probability. Some have called the action by these officers, murder and others an accident. In either case, what is clear is that the officers' actions showed no value for the life and safety of Mr. Floyd. In their minds he was not a man. In their minds, he was a Black man and that made him less than human.

So, what made this death different? Why did it matter this time? Maybe it's because people had nothing else to do because of the pandemic restrictions. Maybe it's because on various social media platforms and some news networks, the victim's past was brought up to somehow justify what had happened and remove responsibility from the witnessed perpetrator. Whatever the reason why this one event triggered it, all around the world, people, took to the streets to protest the continued violence and brutality of police towards Black and other individuals and minority communities. When these protests first started, the message was clear. Changes need to be made in the systems that are designed and responsible for serving the needs of the community. The policies that would protect a group of officers from suffering

the consequences of mismanaging and abusing the authority given to them as protectors of a community needed to change. In truth, any governmental policy, leadership, or leader that causes and/or contributes to the disparate treatment of African American communities need to be addressed, removed, and replaced with policies and leadership that moves towards equal treatment for all members of all communities within its jurisdiction. Based on publicly stated comments and commitments, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler and Commissioners Eudaly, Fritz, and Hardesty agree.

It is refreshing to hear it stated that the various Bureaus within the City of Portland, are looking at themselves to determine which policies and practices have been established that have not taken into consideration the impact on Black staff and will work to address them. It would be easy for any bureau to point the finger at another and recognize their shortcomings. CAAN wishes to encourage all Bureaus to look within and change their policies and practices to support the beautiful diversity, resources, expertise and knowledge, within their own agencies. Based on a survey of the City's African American staff, many felt like there was no support for them or the work they do. Many felt there was different treatment being shown by their bureau's leaders and management between minority and non-minority employees. Many felt undervalued, over-burdened, underrepresented, and sometimes unsafe. With the Mayor's talk of it being time for a change, the City's Black employees hope that it goes beyond rhetoric.

Like most protests, those here in Portland have become louder. After over 3 months of marching and protesting and shouting and chanting, the passion and desire for change continues. Unfortunately, like many protests seeking to change the status quo, they have also begun to suffer from violence. This violence has not stayed in commercial areas. Protests and marches have moved into residential neighborhoods causing damage to people's homes and unfortunately resulting in more loss of life. With various, and sometimes ill intentioned, groups joining the protest, the violent response by and against Portland's police, and the impact of having federal agents engaging, covertly and violently with protestors, the original message and purpose behind the protests have become blurred. There is federal condemnation of local leadership. It seems there are daily incidents of new police actions, such as Kenosha and Rochester, that shows the continued discrimination against African Americans; especially considering that a White gunman who was witnessed shooting protesters, was able to immediately walk by several police, while still carrying his assault rifle, and go home for the evening. With an election coming up and the furthering political divide that is overriding a civil unity, there are multiple messages being directed towards and by members of the Black community that seek to confuse the issues, downplay the trauma, and ignore the increasing evidence of the systemic racism and biases held within our societal infrastructure. Despite current activities, it is not a message of anarchy, but it is a reminder that a people can only take so much responsibility for a community and society they are not allowed to take ownership in. Continued devaluation of a people caused the devaluation of that society. That being said, while CAAN does not endorse the violence and damage that has been caused by rioters, we do stand with those who march and chant to be heard and valued as humans worthy of our civil rights. The street is the courtroom in which a community holds those granted power and privilege in a society are held accountable when they break the civil contract by acting irresponsibly and unjustly. Despite the community unrest, we hope that City leaders will maintain the priority of creating a racially inclusive and equitable community for City employees and the recipients of its services.

We, the members of CAAN, want to encourage you Bureau Directors to not shy away from the needed change within your bureau. The many layers of leadership need to recognize that change starts at the top and so the values you hold for your agencies and the people in them will play out in the operations of your agency. Your leadership will affect the morale, energy, and productivity of your staff, and will

contribute to both retention and turnover of staff based on your choices. It is not just the Police who need to look at their biases, but all of us.

As a Director, leadership is expected, and you are responsible and accountable for making the changes that urgently need to happen to bring about a more just and equitable system that no longer reinforces racist anti-blackness policies and procedures.

Like many of us you may be determining what steps you can take on this path to racial justice. CAAN recommends the following steps that could lead to more meaningful change:

- 1.** Assist CAAN when they host a meeting of Black staff at your bureau. By co-sponsoring and encouraging participation. Encourage Black and African American staff to participate in affinity groups. By providing and supporting safe spaces and time to process the recent events, it will help retain Blackstaff. The Mayor has sanctioned paid time for all staff to participate in their respective affinity groups, but many staff have reflected that their direct supervisors are not open to staff using this time. Intentional encouragement from leadership for staff to partake in affinity group activities, bureau sanctioned listening sessions (which has been done for some bureaus like BES and through OEHR), and equity based discussions within work groups are intentional ways to show value for Black staff and the issues faced as they come to work.
- 2.** Evaluate how many Black staff have achieved leadership roles in your bureau. Evaluate whether staff in comparable roles are paid equitably. Work with your BHR partner if you see employment disparities. Evaluate how you retain Black staff.
- 3.** Review and update the Racial Equity and Inclusion Recruitment plan for your bureau. Every bureau should have a Racial Equity and Inclusion Recruitment plan. This allows your bureau to make sure it is putting intentional effort to make sure the diversity of the team reflects the diversity of the population intended to serve.
- 4.** Work with BHR to review and adjust hiring and onboarding practices. Do an assessment of hiring practices for full time permanent positions vs those for part time, temp, or seasonal positions. Include more than 1 KSA that ties to racial equity and inclusion. Establishing a mentor/shadowing program for new hires can help to acclimate new Black employees to the culture of the working environment.
- 5.** Include at least two to three People of Color, including at least one Black staff member on every hiring committee. If you do not have enough Staff of Color to meet this goal invite Black staff or community members from outside of your bureau.
- 6.** When creating programs and initiatives that affect Black and African American staff or community, ensure collaboration with the intended community. Make funding and service decisions that demonstrate an understanding of the Black community and is followed up with programs and services designed for that community rather than trying to assist them with options that are designed by and for White and post gentrified communities. Move beyond the rhetoric of change while holding onto traditional practices and programming and create longstanding relationships with communities impacted so that our work is not seen as transactional outreach or misguided gestures.
- 7.** Most, if not all, bureaus have an Equity Manager. You need to support these staff and hold yourself accountable to the work the Equity Manager is doing. Their jobs are to assess and help

improve the equity goals of the bureaus, thus it is imperative that you take an honest look at yourself and the policies and practices of your bureau in working to improve in this area.

8. Do not be afraid to say Black or African American. CAAN understands the political correctness and inclusive intent of the term BIPOC. There have been many terms over the years that shied away from specifying a group and attempting to be inclusive. Understand however that Black people have had, and continue to have, a unique experience in this City. When talking about our experience and our needs as Black staff and community members specifically, inclusive terms can sometimes diminish the value those experiences and needs.

Enclosed is the CAAN Workplace survey findings and recommendations. A similar survey found [here](#) was recently conducted by Partners in Diversity Workplace [Diversity Retention Project](#). We encourage all Directors to adopt these, and other, proactive strategies to attract, retain and promote Black employees.

Although CAAN does not have the authority to direct or mandate Bureau leadership take these points and suggestions into consideration, we do represent the voices and concerns of the City's Black employees and are watching. We do request that you respond to CAAN leadership at CAAN@portlandoregon.gov to confirm your receipt of this letter and ask that you let us know which actions you plan to take to help create a more diverse and inclusive work environment within your bureau. Your decisions and actions will be confirmation of whether the City's spoken concern for Black employees are genuine with tangible evidence and effort, or just the popular words of the moment and empty rhetoric.

Sincerely,

City African American Network Leadership