

1963-2020

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

# Commitment March

*Get Your Knee Off Our Necks*

WE MARCH FOR HIGHER MINIMUM WAGES COVERAGE FOR ALL WORKERS NOW!



1963-2020

# Commemoration. Covid-19. Continuation. Commitment.



**Martin Luther King, III**  
New York State Complete  
Count Committee Co-Chair

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Justice and Civil Rights Movement

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Black Lives Matter. It is at once a cry for help and a demand for justice. It is a mantra, written boldly on streets and buildings, which stirs both pride and outrage. Writing it, saying it, painting it, praying it, supporting it has become the “We Shall Overcome” of this time and this moment.

Our dream as we gather in 2020 remains rooted in the meaning of the American Dream. Like Black Lives Matter, it is not simply a slogan; it is a concept that is based, as Dr. King reminded us, on the bedrock principles of equal opportunity, shared responsibility, and the dignity of all. Our work continues because the dream remains, in some ways, as elusive today as it was in 1963 for millions of African Americans and others who continue to be locked out and left behind.

2020 has been a jarring and eye-opening year for civil rights and social justice issues in America. Fifty-seven years removed from the height of the Civil Rights Movement and the historic 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, we have gains to celebrate, yet much work still to be done. We are met with the sobering truth that many of our gains over the nearly six decades since the March—in educational opportunity, homeownership, civil rights, voting rights—are being challenged, and in some instances weakened, by twin viral pandemics. One is the novel coronavirus (Covid-19), which has infected nearly 6 million Americans and claimed the lives of nearly 200,000 souls, a disproportionate

percentage of whom are African American, Latino, Asian American and Native people. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed in a graphic and unflinching light what is wrong with America in terms of our health and opportunity — her unfulfilled promises made to African Americans and other people of color that must be honored. This disease is robbing people of their lives and livelihood. African Americans and other people of color are dying at three times the rate of whites, while simultaneously making up a significant percentage of low-wage, frontline, essential workers whose labor is keeping this economy on life support.

The other foe, ever-present and unyielding, is “systemic racism.” The practice, given a name during the Civil Rights movement, was identified as one of the nation’s most urgent concerns by President Lyndon Johnson’s 1968 Kerner Commission which warned that our nation was “moving towards two societies – one black, one white, separate and unequal.” In every facet of our lives, from law enforcement, banking, education, the health care system and, of course, in housing, systemic racism

continues to deny African Americans and other people of color full equality and opportunity. Just as during the 1960s, over the last several months we have seen people take to the streets to protest at home and abroad. The fight against systemic racism has renewed and expanded energy invoked (at least in part) in response to the murder of thousands of Black men, women, and children at the hands of police. The world watched graphic footage as the

*“Almost 50 years ago,  
I gave a little blood on that  
bridge in Selma, Alabama  
for the right to vote. I am  
not going to stand by and  
let the Supreme Court  
take the right to vote  
away from us.”*

-- The Late Congressman John Lewis at the  
50th Anniversary March on Washington





**Rev. Al Sharpton**  
 Founder and President  
 National Action Network



**Marc H. Morial**  
 President and CEO  
 National Urban League



**Derrick Johnson**  
 President and CEO, NAACP



**Melanie L. Campbell**  
 President and CEO of the  
 National Coalition on Black  
 Civic Participation and  
 Convener of the Black  
 Women's Roundtable  
 Public Policy Network



**Sherrilyn Ifill**  
 President and Director-Counsel  
 of the NAACP Legal Defense  
 and Educational Fund, Inc.  
 (LDF)



**Kristen Clarke**  
 President and Executive  
 Director, Lawyers' Committee  
 for Civil Rights Under Law

lives of African Americans, including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Rashard Brooks, and many others were stolen. They marched and reminded us to say the names of Breonna Taylor, a mother and essential worker, who was murdered by police in her own bed while sleeping.

In the years since the original March on Washington, we have witnessed overt and covert efforts aimed at reversing progress in numerous areas from voting and civil rights to workers' rights and criminal justice. Perhaps none more important than the Supreme Court's gutting of a key provision of the Voting Rights Act in the 2013 Shelby County decision which stripped away critical protections and safeguards against voter suppression. Additionally, the courts continue to undermine various civil rights protections embedded in federal statutes.

The economic, social and legal disparities that continue to plague African Americans and low-income and working-class Americans are causes for more than concern they are causes for alarm and underscore the urgency of this time.

On August 28, 1963, more than 250,000 people of all races, ages and cultural backgrounds gathered at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to demand justice, jobs, and equality. That 1963 march was the result of collaboration by six organizations and leaders who, despite different approaches and agendas, joined together to achieve common goals and to shed light on the political and social inequities inherent in the laws of the United States. They included A. Philip Randolph, labor leader and the principal visionary behind the march; Whitney M. Young, Jr., Executive Director of the National Urban League; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., founder/President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); John Lewis, President of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee (SNCC); Roy Wilkins, President of the NAACP; and James Farmer, President of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

In late August 2013, we gathered again in Washington, DC for the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. In that same collaborative spirit, we come together now, in 2020, with an expanded group of organizations, including organized labor, religious organizations, social justice groups and others who, despite different focus areas, embrace our common theme of social, economic and justice parity for all. Many have joined in person, with millions more joining virtually. Not only do we honor the original march, but we dedicate ourselves to the ongoing pursuit of equality in America. Our efforts today have been shaped by our determination that the 57th anniversary of the March on Washington, as well as of Dr. King's historic "I Have a Dream" speech, would be both a commemoration and a continuation of the unfinished work of building our more perfect union.

The theme of this year's march, *Commitment March: Get Your Knee Off Our Necks*, is a tribute to George Perry Floyd, Jr. who was murdered on May 25, 2020, by a Minneapolis police officer whose knee was pressed into Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, while three other officers stood by, complacent in the atrocity. The murder was captured on cell phone video for the world to see. George Floyd, who also was unemployed and infected with the novel coronavirus when he was killed by police, was the embodiment of the convergence of the lethal viruses on Black America. While George Floyd has been the focal point of this social justice movement, there are thousands of Blacks who have died at the hands of police whose names we will never forget: Tamir Rice, Travon Martin, Tony McDade, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Natasha McKenna, Michelle Cusseaux and many others.

We, along with a coalition of civil rights, social justice, labor, business and community leaders, share this document to set forth the principles of our civil rights and social justice agenda.

This policy agenda articulates a vision of national priorities focused on achieving equality and economic opportunity for African Americans, urban communities and all low-income and working-class Americans.

With the partnership and input from the undersigned leaders, this forward-looking agenda lays out five urgent domestic goals for the nation:

- Fundamentally Transforming the Criminal Justice System
- Protect and Defend Voting Rights During the Pandemic and Beyond
- Achieve Economic Parity for African Americans
- Promote Equity in Educational Opportunity
- Promote a Full and Fair Census Count
- Promote a Healthier Nation by Eliminating and Prioritizing Testing, Treatments and Cures for Covid-19 in Communities of Color

When we compare these goals with the demands made on August afternoons in 1963 and in 2013, we are struck by the similarities.

In 1963, as today, the most pressing demands centered on economic equality, educational opportunity and parity, voting rights, and civil rights. But instead of fighting against discrimination in hiring or a \$2 minimum wage, we're fighting for direct support, universal

income, job training, and wage equity for those persons who became jobless as a result of the pandemic. Instead of calling for school segregation to end, we're demanding an end to disparities in educational investment and to close the digital divide and the homework gap. Rather than calling for meaningful and progressive civil rights legislation, we're fighting to restore key provisions of the Voting Rights Act. Instead of fighting for more representation in Congress and statehouses around the country, we are fighting new efforts, blessed by a conservative Supreme Court, that has approved gerrymandered districts which dilute Black voting power and nefarious Census practices which will result in an undercount of communities of color in the country. Rather than fighting to extend the gains in Black and Brown homeownership, we are preparing for an historic tsunami of evictions and foreclosures caused by the pandemic and the federal government's failure to adequately address the Covid-19 virus and its repercussions.

The work that lies ahead as we confront both the progression and regression of equal opportunity in 21st century America will be challenging. But we have a solid foundation and action plan aimed at achieving the identified five urgent domestic goals and moving our communities toward economic empowerment, equality, and prosperity.

We honor our past in commemoration. We change our present with continuation. We create our future through commitment.

We hope you will join us at each step along our journey. Our work is not yet done.

## **In Empowerment and Encouragement,**

### **Martin Luther King, III**

New York State Complete Count Committee Co-Chair

### **Rev. Al Sharpton**

Founder and President National Action Network

### **Marc H. Morial**

President and CEO National Urban League

### **Derrick Johnson**

President and CEO, NAACP

### **Melanie L. Campbell**

President and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation and Convener of the Black Women's Roundtable Public Policy Network

### **Sherrilyn Ifill**

President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)

### **Kristen Clarke**

President and Executive Director, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

# March on Washington

# 1963



↑ Members of the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa meet with President John F. Kennedy in 1962.. *Left to right:* Whitney M. Young, Jr. (Executive Director, National Urban League), Theodore Brown (President, American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa), the Hon. Adlai Stevenson (U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations), Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference), Roy Wilkins (Executive Secretary, NAACP), President John F. Kennedy, Dorothy Height (President, National Council of Negro Women), A. Philip Randolph (President, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters), and James Farmer (National Director, Congress of Racial Equality - CORE).



↑ *Left to right:* James Farmer (National Director, Congress of Racial Equality - CORE), A. Philip Randolph (President, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters), Roy Wilkins (Executive Secretary, NAACP), Whitney M. Young, Jr. (Executive Director, National Urban League), Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference).



↑ Over 200,000 people assemble at the Lincoln Memorial for the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom to shed light on the political and social inequities inherent in the laws of the United States.



# COVID-19 Response





# Justice Reform





# *Realize the Dream March*

*On August 28, 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom became the largest demonstration for human rights in United States history. A racially-integrated crowd of more than 250,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC to protest racial and economic inequalities in America.*

That day, the marchers made a pledge of personal commitment to the struggle for jobs and freedom for all Americans.

Fifty-seven years later, on August 28, 2020, in commemoration of the 1963 March and in solidarity with ongoing demonstrations that began in May, another multitude of marchers gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in peace and purpose to protest ongoing racial and economic inequalities in the United States. The marchers again pledge their personal commitment to this cause. The 2020 pledge reflects the rise of social media, the encroachment of voter suppression following the 2013 gutting of the Voting Rights Act, and efforts to exclude communities of color from the 2020 Census.

Still relevant.  
Still powerful.  
Still necessary.





## 2020 MARCHERS' PLEDGE

STANDING BEFORE THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL ON THE 28TH OF AUGUST, 2020 OR IN SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE PRESENT AT THE MEMORIAL SITE, I AFFIRM MY COMPLETE PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, CIVIL RIGHTS, JOBS, FREEDOM, ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND JUSTICE FOR ALL AMERICANS.

TO FULFILL THAT COMMITMENT, I PLEDGE THAT I WILL NOT RETREAT UNTIL VICTORY IS WON.

I PLEDGE THAT I WILL JOIN AND SUPPORT ALL ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN IN GOOD FAITH IN ACCORD WITH TIME-HONORED DEMOCRATIC TRADITION OF NONVIOLENT PROTEST, OR PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND PETITION AND OF REDRESS THROUGH THE COURTS AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.

I PLEDGE TO CARRY THE MESSAGE OF THE MARCH TO MY FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS BACK HOME AND TO AROUSE THEM TO AN EQUAL COMMITMENT AND AN EQUAL EFFORT. I WILL MARCH IN PERSON OR VIRTUALLY, AND

I WILL COMMUNICATE WITH MY ELECTED OFFICIALS IN WRITING OR BY CALLING. I WILL COMPLETE MY CENSUS FORM. I WILL TRAIN OR ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO TRAIN TO BECOME A POLL WORKER. I WILL DEMONSTRATE, AND I WILL VOTE AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO VOTE. I WILL USE THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO RAISE AWARENESS AND MOBILIZE. I WILL WORK TO MAKE SURE THAT MY VOICE AND THOSE OF MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS RING CLEAR AND DETERMINED FROM EVERY CORNER OF OUR LAND. I WILL DO MY PART TO REGAIN AND SURPASS THE PROGRESS OF THE LAST 57 YEARS.

I WILL PLEDGE MY HEART AND MY MIND AND MY BODY, UNEQUIVOCALLY AND WITHOUT REGARD TO PERSONAL SACRIFICE, TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SOCIAL PEACE THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE.

Original Declaration Signed on August 28th, 2020



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# A MESSAGE TO THE NATION

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*We civil rights and social justice leaders come together on the precipice of an election as consequential as any before it—one in which Black people will play a crucial and decisive role in changing the outcomes of the presidential election, numerous U.S. Senate, U.S. House, gubernatorial, state legislative, mayoral and other races across the nation.*

*We come together as a growing coalition representing the changing face of America to urge our elected leaders at the national, state and local levels to give our unique challenges utmost consideration as they grapple with the daunting fiscal and social challenges facing our country.*



The current plight of Black communities across the country underscores the urgency of our demand. Black communities have been disproportionately battered by the novel coronavirus pandemic, and yet our communities have benefited the least from the fragile economic stimulus and supports. Black unemployment remains in double digits – with 3 million working-age Blacks out of work. The Black unemployment rate is not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels for another decade. Thirty million (30,000,000) American households are food insecure as of last month, including 6 million Black households. Income inequality and the ever-widening wealth gap are at historic levels and threaten to relegate the Black community to perpetual underclass status. Black homeownership is at levels that predate the passage of federal fair housing laws in the 1960s. According to the federal government, nearly 43.4 million Americans – or 25.3 percent of the adult population – either missed last month’s rent or mortgage payment or have little to no confidence that they can pay next month’s rent or mortgage on time. As many as 44 percent of Black rental households – 5.4 million – had little to no confidence they would be able to meet their next rent payment on time. And those who wish to curtail investment education and career preparation further dim the prospects for upward mobility for our young people, seniors, the formerly incarcerated.

We come together at this historic juncture to articulate our vision for those priorities that can—and must—drive economic recovery and rebirth not just for the

African- American community, but also for urban communities and all low-income and working-class Americans. While this convening of African-American leaders occurs in Washington, DC, our efforts must extend beyond the elected officials in this city, where filibuster and obstruction have prevented the enactment of a host of progressive measures. State legislators, governors and mayors play an increasingly important role in setting policies that determine how our community will survive and thrive, including the implementation of Medicaid and education reform. Accordingly, we commit to redouble our efforts to educate and advocate in states and cities for measures that support our opportunity agenda for African Americans.

We, the undersigned organizations, are bound by our common goal to protect, promote and defend the rights, well-being and opportunity of the roughly 42 million Black people in this country. As we approach the 57th anniversary of the March on Washington and the 157th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, we must have a seat at the table to fully leverage the talents, intellectual capital and contributions of our leaders to craft a domestic agenda that brings African-Americans closer to parity and equality, and fulfills the promise of these milestones.

This declaration represents a first step in developing a public policy agenda, and we pledge to continue to collaborate on specific recommendations with clearly defined objectives as we move forward as a united community.

→ 1 ←

**Fundamentally Transforming the Criminal Justice System**

→ 2 ←

**Protect and Defend Voting Rights  
During the Pandemic and Beyond**

→ 3 ←

**Achieve Economic Parity for African Americans**

→ 4 ←

**Promote Equity in Educational Opportunity**

→ 5 ←

**Promote a Fair and Accurate Census**

→ 6 ←

**Promote a Healthier Nation by Eliminating and  
Prioritizing Testing, Treatments and Cures for Covid-19  
in Communities of Color**



## Fundamentally Transforming the Criminal Justice System

We support the House-passed George Floyd Justice in Policing Act (H.R. 7120). Abusive state-sanctioned police violence has exacted systemic brutality and fatality upon Black people since our nation's founding. The current protests across our country are not new. They are in response to a long cycle of lawlessness against Black people. Police have shot and killed on average approximately 1,000 people in the United States in each of the past three years, and 2020 is on track to meet or exceed that number. Moreover, Black people are three times more likely than white people to be killed by police. According to a 2019 University of Michigan study, police violence is the sixth leading cause of death among young Black men. For too long, the cycle of police brutality and racism has been met with cosmetic tinkering instead of substantive structural change. The current public protests in our cities are a response not only to unjust policing of Black people but are a cry and demand for structural change writ large.

Civil rights groups have come together to support passage of H.R.7120, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this year. We urge the U.S. Senate to pass, and the president to sign, the bill into law. We particularly acknowledge the provision of the bill that would, for the first time in our Nation's history, make it a federal crime to attempt, conspire, or carry out a lynching against a person because of their actual or perceived race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, or religion. As the Black Lives Matter social justice movement has rallied demonstrators and recently gained support across racial groups, violent backlash targeting African Americans have increased with the alarming rise in groups and individuals spewing hate and promulgating attacks on African Americans.

We also support the elimination of the cradle-to-prison pipeline, spurred in large part by the War on Drugs, that has exacted a heavy cost not only on the African-American community but on taxpayers and the economy. We call for greater federal oversight of federal and local law enforcement to end the practice of racial profiling.

The school-to-prison pipeline starts in America's schools where Black students are routinely subjected to far more severe punishment than their white peers for the same infractions. These students are more likely to be incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities, and subsequently in adult prisons. The pipeline is further fueled by the disproportionate sentencing guidelines that call for longer jail time for some "urban" crimes, while similar crimes in a white-collar setting receive far more lenient treatment. The severity of punishment for crimes should not be dictated by zip code or race and we therefore call for uniformity in sentencing.

The pipeline is also primed by an insidious and obscene private prison industrial complex that lobbies for harsher sentencing--not for any societal benefit; but to increase the prison headcount for financial gain. The Federal Bureau of Prisons maintains the nation's highest number of people managed by private prison contractors. Since 2000, its use has increased 77 percent, and the number of people in private federal custody — which includes prisons, half-way houses and home confinement — totaled 27,569 in 2017. Among the immigrant detention population, 26,249 people – 73% of the detained population – were confined in privately run facilities in 2017. The privately-detained immigrant population grew 442 percent since 2002.

Racial discrimination permeates every aspect of the criminal justice system, from arrest to trial and from sentencing to reentry. In 2019, Congress passed and the president signed The First Step Act, which shortened mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenses. It also eased a federal "three strikes" rule —

which imposed a life sentence for three or more convictions — and instead issues a 25-year sentence. Most consequentially, it expanded the “drug safety-valve,” which would give judges more discretion to deviate from mandatory minimums when sentencing for nonviolent drug offenses. While this legislation was important, it is indeed a “first-step” and much work remains to reform the criminal justice system. We will continue to pursue measures that will transform law enforcement practices in our communities that are unjust and that result in mass incarceration; bail reform; measures that strengthen our public defender system; a return to a “Smart on Crime” approach to prosecution by U.S. and district attorneys, and prison reforms to address the inhumane conditions of incarceration in many of our Nation’s prisons.

We also urge Congress to support the reauthorization of The Family Violence Services and Prevention Act (FVPSA) and The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and provide funding for culturally specific programs and resources that serve the African American community in order to reduce the risk factors of violence against African-American women. The violence African American women experience comes in many forms: domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual assault and rape, sexual harassment in the workplace and on the street, and emotional abuse. Black women experience the highest rates of such violence.

African-American women are disproportionately vulnerable to violence because their daily lives rest in the intersections of race, class, and gender. This leaves Black women exposed and unprotected to violence across the continuum of intimate partner violence, community violence, and institutional/structural violence.

## — 2 —

### **Protect and Defend Voting Rights During the Pandemic and Beyond**

After the Supreme Court’s Shelby County decision, we have seen a rise of an ugly and yet familiar effort to suppress the right to vote. Reductions of early voting, restrictive identification requirements, onerous registration procedures, exact name match requirements, purges of voting rolls, foreign and domestic disinformation campaigns, and mandated in-person voting during a pandemic are all efforts designed to undermine the rights of African- Americans to the franchise.

It is clear that some in power view the right to vote as a tool that can be manipulated to achieve a desired political end, so we call on Congress to extend and strengthen federal protections for voters and reaffirm voting as a constitutional right for all, not a privilege for some. We urge the Senate to pass and the president to sign H.R.4, The Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2019, into law. This is the most fitting tribute to the late Congressman John Lewis, who dedicated his life to the advancement of voting and civil rights.

It will take an unprecedented effort this election cycle to ensure that the people of color can freely and fairly exercise their right to vote. We witnessed the adverse impact of Covid-19 during the 2020 Primaries in Georgia, Wisconsin, and other states, where hundreds of polling places were closed or consolidated in part due to poll worker shortages. We have witnessed recent efforts by this administration to undermine the confidence in and the operation of elections by mail. Further, Black voters experienced other voter suppression issues including long lines with extreme wait times, challenges with receipt and completion of mail in ballots. In addition to the voter suppression issues



amplified by Covid-19, there is a national shortage of over 250,000 poll workers needed across the country.

Poll workers are front line workers for our democracy. A caring, well-trained, culturally competent poll worker can play a crucial role in ensuring the strength and integrity of the voting process. These workers are the lifeblood of well-run polling places, and they help secure our rights as U.S. citizens. That is why we are calling on March participants, our friends, and family members to show your support for your community by becoming a poll worker. Poll workers check in voters, answer voters' questions, set up and test voting machines, issue ballots, and other critical tasks. Poll workers are paid for this work and, in some cases, get paid for the time spent in training sessions.

### — 3 —

## **Achieve Economic Parity for African Americans**

Economic parity begins with fundamental fairness. The pandemic has thrust long-standing economic injustices into the forefront of our consciousness and while these issues are not new, we must dedicate a renewed sense of urgency toward addressing them. These injustices will never be properly addressed without an acknowledgement that the vestiges of slavery – America's original sin – continue to deny opportunities and drive outcome disparities that only widen over time. Our leaders must adopt a fair response to the Covid-19 pandemic that has destroyed the nation's economic output, thrown tens of millions of people out of work, left families with greater food insecurity, cut off millions of school-age children from learning, and has left municipal and state budgets for public services in shambles.

In the immediate term, we believe that H.R. 6800, The HEROES Act, passed by the U.S House of Representatives on May 15, 2020, represents the best response to the economic devastation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. We urge the Senate to pass the HEROES Act and the president to sign it into law immediately. It has been estimated that nearly half of all Black-owned small businesses have been lost as a result of the pandemic. The Black unemployment rate stands at 14.6 percent. The potential for lasting economic dislocation and devastation is great unless urgent, immediate and comprehensive investments are made to support Black communities, small business owners, homeowners and renters.

The United States suffered intolerable poverty rates that have only worsened during the pandemic. At the bottom of the income distribution, the Black poverty rate is two-and-a-half times the white poverty rate. One in five black people in this country live below the poverty line—that's below about \$26,000 annual income for a family of four. Job loss for those living at such low incomes is absolutely shattering. Safety net programs are designed to ensure that Americans experiencing poverty have access to necessities, including food, shelter, health care, and access to programs that are critical for the basic needs of families. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and disability and unemployment insurance are well-used, and familiar aspects of the social safety net.

The current reduction in housing assistance, SNAP, Social Security and other basic needs programs, along with harsh work reporting requirements for several federal programs, have all served to push African American families deeper into poverty and leave them without the assistance that they need to rise upward and close the inequality gap.

We urge Congress to protect and expand safety net programs that support the economic security of African-Americans in need of these programs and to eliminate the unduly burdensome reporting requirements that make access to safety net programs elusive to African Americans and families who need them the most.

More than 7.3 million African American workers in the United States cannot earn a single paid sick day, forcing them to choose between their health and the health of their families and their economic security when they get sick or need to care for a sick loved one.

On average, African-American workers are paid less and have less savings and access to wealth than white workers. More than 30 percent of African American households have no net savings or assets to draw from when an unexpected loss of income occurs. These families are least able to afford losing any portion of their income. So, for these families, if an illness strikes, they must risk their jobs and financial stability by staying at home, or their health and the health of their community by going to work. As a result, for African American families, missing a few days of work can mean the difference between the ability to buy groceries or afford to pay the mortgage or rent for the month.

Currently, 13 states and the District of Columbia have passed paid sick days laws. A growing body of evidence shows that these existing laws are working well. We urge the federal government to enact a federal paid leave policy that would enable millions of African Americans to earn job-protected paid leave that would increase the health and well-being for themselves and their families.

With respect to the jobs agenda, we must push our leaders to craft and adopt legislation that allows for expanded collective bargaining rights and the protection of workers through unions, which are a primary

vehicle (particularly for vulnerable and disenfranchised workers) to rightfully claim their spot at the table and make their voices heard. Unionized workers enjoy better benefits, higher pay, more job security and workplace safety.

In addition, inadequate investment in public goods that facilitate economic mobility have left us flat-footed. Budgets are moral documents and we must invest in resources, programs, agencies and initiatives that serve the people and their needs, not acquiesce to the demands of monied interests and lobbying groups that seek, first and foremost, to line their own pockets. We must align our investments with desired outcomes, meaning if we want more economic opportunity for communities of color, we need to invest in jobs and bias training (especially in high-paying sectors), skill acquisition, equal educational opportunities as well as equal lending opportunities for Black consumers and businesses, a stronger Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and other critical civil rights enforcement agencies, among other things.

In the medium term, we urge Congress to pass H.R.40, “Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act.” This is a centuries’ long reckoning this country must have with its past and the treatment of Africans brought to this country 400 years ago. The bill would authorize \$12 million for a 13-member commission to study the effects of slavery and make recommendations to Congress. Introduced originally in 1989, the legislation has never received serious consideration, in no small part due to the refusal of far too many in Congress to acknowledge how the legacy of chattel slavery continues to prevent African-Americans from realizing the benefits of full citizenship and opportunity.

No reckoning of this Nation’s anti-Black racism can be complete without justice for Black women and girls. Black women have a long history as consistent workforce



participants, so equal rights and equal pay are among our top priorities. Sixty-eight percent of Black women are the sole breadwinners in their households, so federal guarantees to end the pay, property and employment distinctions are critical for the financial stability and well-being of African American families.

To protect the rights of African American women and level the playing field for Black women in the workplace, we urge Congress to move swiftly to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, and pass the Raise the Wage Act of 2019, and the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act.

Finally, but certainly not least of all, we must call on our elected officials and leaders to reform a tax system that has for too long preyed on low-income communities while almost exclusively exalting and rewarding corporations and high-wealth individuals. A fairer tax system would help tremendously with investing in our communities by supporting and creating the programs and agencies that will level the playing field.

The suffering of those who have been hit the hardest throughout the pandemic — people of color, women, immigrants and migrants — has been exacerbated by these injustices and will only continue to worsen until we can achieve economic parity for African Americans and those who have historically been left behind.

## — 4 —

### **Promote Equity in Educational Opportunity**

Education has always been a major front in the battle for civil rights in our Nation. A quality, world-class educational experience provides the on-ramp to success and, without it, our ability to compete as a community and as a country in a global economy is diminished.

The disparity in educational investment in minority communities and the resulting achievement gap among Black youth is the biggest threat to equality and upward mobility. Therefore, we support progressive funding mechanisms that promote quality and direct more resources to those areas where the need is greatest—more often in high poverty and minority communities.

As a result of the pandemic, tens of millions of school-age children have been denied access to in-person instruction, leaving remote learning as the only option for instruction in many communities. For many families of color, broadband connectivity and computers needed to receive remote instruction are out of reach. Low-income communities have the lowest rates of broadband adoption. In order to close this digital divide, we urge Congress to provide meaningful broadband and educational resource/equipment subsidies to families of children who are eligible to participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program to ensure that these children have the equipment and tools necessary to access remote instruction.

We also urge all school districts and universities to approach school reopening in a way that prioritizes the health and safety of children, parents, teachers, and other staff. African Americans face a higher risk of infection and mortality from the coronavirus. We urge public officials and administrators to follow

applicable guidance from independent public health professionals on when it is appropriate to reopen schools, the maintenance of proper physical distancing, the issuance of personal protective equipment, and other mitigation procedures.

We also support a universal early childhood curriculum that prepares our youngsters to learn and achieve at a competitive level. That preparation is useless, however, without also providing youngsters with the schools and tools they deserve including qualified and engaged teachers, and comprehensive in-school and community-based programs that provide academic support and motivation to reverse the drop-out trend and encourage children to reach their full potential. We also urge leaders to increase investment for curricula and programs that prepare youth for the careers of the future, including science, technology engineering and math.

Finally, we believe college should be an attainable—and affordable—goal, and that federal resources should be structured to ensure that financial aid does not become a barrier to the development of the next generation of leaders in business and government. Federal and state resources should be invested in those institutions that graduate higher percentages of African Americans, such as HCBUs, MSIs and community colleges. The federal government should also use its leverage to incentivize states to invest public dollars in HCBUs such that they are comparable to, and competitive with, predominantly white institutions.

## — 5 —

### **Promote a Fair and Accurate Census**

Mandated by the U.S. Constitution, a national census is conducted every ten years to provide an understanding of the United States population. The census is far more than a simple head count. It is a snapshot of America that determines how congressional seats are apportioned, how legislative districts are drawn, how state and federal dollars are distributed, where businesses choose to locate and build new stores, where hospitals are located and so much more. In addition, the census is essential to the monitoring and enforcement of civil rights laws governing voting, fair housing, education, and other protections.

For several years, concerned communities across the country have worked tirelessly to spread the word about the importance of the 2020 Census and the need for everyone—especially Black Americans—to participate. Even so, Black America is facing an historic crossroad due to low participation in the 2020 Census. Additionally, the current Administration recently announced that the U.S. Census Bureau will end all counting efforts by September 30th, a month sooner than previously announced and in the midst of a public health crisis.

The economic and political harms of undercounting already vulnerable and under-served communities, including Black and Latino children, Black men at nearly every age, the digital “homeless” with no email or internet access, and so many more cannot be overstated. These vulnerabilities have only been intensified by Covid-19 disparities and racial injustices. This is NOT the time to roll back census efforts



We are urging members of the Senate to include much needed language and fund allocation in the next Covid relief package to extend the statutory reporting deadlines for the 2020 Census by four months. This will provide the necessary time and resources for the Census Bureau to count everyone, especially historically undercounted groups. We must ensure that EACH and EVERY person is counted. A rushed census will harm every state and threaten our community's fair representation in Congress.

## — 6 —

### **Promote a Healthier Nation by Eliminating and Prioritizing Testing, Treatments and Cures for Covid-19 in Communities of Color**

According to one recent estimate, Covid-19 is the third-leading cause of death among Black Americans. In 2020 alone, more Blacks will die of Covid-19 than will succumb to diabetes, strokes, accidents, or pneumonia. The coronavirus pandemic has placed a glaring light on the inequities that plague our healthcare system. For too many people of color, healthcare is tied directly to employment. High unemployment means low access to healthcare. Furthermore, low wage workers often do not have employer-provided healthcare and too few states have opted into Medicaid expansion. And, during the Covid-19 pandemic, too few African Americans have access to rapid testing, antibody testing, therapeutics, and vaccines. This pandemic has already infected nearly 6 million people and claimed the lives of at least 77,000 people of color. By virtue of our overrepresentation in frontline jobs, poor access to healthcare, and systemic racism, African Americans are uniquely susceptible to the virus.

And, we support prioritizing the availability of testing in communities of color, contact tracing, and paid medical leave for persons who contract the virus, are under quarantine, or have to care for people who are under quarantine or who are ill. Personal protective equipment should be made available to front-line workers and should be paid for by employers.

We also encourage funding to research the long-term health effects of Covid-19 infection, and to support those suffering from prolonged recovery from the disease. We support full and timely implementation of the historic Affordable Care Act (ACA) and believe that by providing access to quality and affordable health care for all, promoting community-based prevention efforts, and expanding Medicaid to our most vulnerable citizens, the ACA will play a pivotal role in reducing the human cost of these disparities.

We also support strong enforcement of environmental protection laws, recognizing that low-income communities disproportionately suffer the consequences of air, water and soil contamination that make us more susceptible to the virus and places us at higher risk of mortality. African Americans are exposed to significantly more of the air pollution particles known as PM 2.5, which have been associated with lung disease, heart disease, and premature death. And African Americans are also more likely to live in communities which are located in closer proximity to unregulated toxic waste facilities.

Deteriorating municipal water infrastructure has a devastating effect, particularly on African American children. Bottle-fed infants, who consume mostly formula mixed with tap water, can ingest high levels of lead. As a result, African American children are three times more likely to have elevated blood lead levels.



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