June 4th, 2020

To: NOPD Chief Shaun Ferguson  
    Mayor LaToya Cantrell  
    Members of the New Orleans City Council

We are a group of healthcare professionals in the Greater New Orleans area who are expressing concern on the alarming use of tear gas against protesters by the New Orleans Police Department.

On Wednesday night, the NOPD used tear gas on protestors on the Crescent City Connection, seriously injuring at least one individual who required emergent care. Tear gas is used as an alternative to more lethal force despite it initially being developed as a tool for physical and psychological torture. Chemical irritants like tear gas are banned from use in warfare, yet we allow them to be used to cause harm on our own citizens. The use of tear gas causes injuries indiscriminately, which according to the organization Physicians for Human Rights, could be a violation of International Human Rights principles.

Those in our community who have been gathering to protest are doing so in the wake of the recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Modesto Reyes and so many other Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement. We stand with those rising up to demand change in the policies and practices that have disproportionately targeted Black communities across the US.

As healthcare professionals, we see the consequences of these discriminatory policies on the physical and emotional health of our Black patients on a daily basis. The evidence supporting this is strong enough that researchers have deemed racism as a public health crisis, linking it to the increased burden of many medical conditions in Black communities. One recent example is the impact that COVID-19 has had in terms of the number of infections and deaths seen in the Black community. As health professionals we acknowledge the increased risk of COVID-19 transmission during these protests, which have been mitigated by practices such as widespread use of masks and hand sanitizing.

However, the use of tear gas is in direct conflict with appropriate infection control measures in times of a pandemic. Its use can increase the risk of infection with COVID-19 by irritating the respiratory tract, increasing inflammation and inducing cough, thus dispersing droplets throughout the surrounding environment. To use a chemical that increases the risk of these symptoms in the midst of one of the deadliest infectious disease outbreaks in modern day history is irresponsible and could contribute to overwhelming an already overburdened healthcare system.

Given that we are still in the middle of a pandemic, it is critical for us to continue to work towards flattening the curve. With that being said, we unequivocally support protestors who gather to
exercise their right to call for change. An open letter by health care professionals across the nation provides other recommendations for harm reduction for those gathering for protests. 

It is the responsibility of the city and the NOPD to prioritize the safety of our community members who are protesting for justice and reform. The use of aggressive techniques such as what was seen Wednesday night as a means of crowd control on individuals exercising their constitutional right to assemble is unconscionable. Escalation of aggression by law enforcement has led to deaths in other cities and could likely happen in New Orleans if these tactics continue to be used. We implore that the NOPD avoid the use of tear gas and other aggressive crowd control techniques on protestors as they struggle towards a more equitable future for Black Americans.

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Rachel Charbonnet, Technician
Lilah El-Fakih RN
Anna Kelley, Licensed Clinical Psychologist Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Tulane University
Kristen Pearson, Assistant Professor
Kyle Pearson, Case Manager
Mark Skellie, Clinical Psychologist, Crescent City Psychological Services
Eric Gaudet, RN
Cody Smith, Licensed Professional Counselor
Lorraine Fei, MD MPH
Kailin Lambuth, Registered Nurse
Blair Stevens, Resident Physician
Madison North, Physician Assistant
Hania Adib, MD
Marui Soomro, Nursing Student
Thomas John, Internal Medicine Resident
Lisa Cressionnie, Registered Nurse
Margaret Schladenhauffen, Registered Nurse, University Medical Center New Orleans
Angelina Dixon, Resident Physician, Tulane University
Allison MD, MPH&TM
Ingrid Krainski ER RN
Heather Alva, Chief Resident of Tulane Pediatrics
Jinnesse Taylor, Medical Resident
Saba Farooq, Resident
Karen Schaeffer, M.D.
Rachel Vangilder, LMSW, Mental Health Professional
Vininder Khunkhun, Medical Director for the Center for Resilience
Meaghan Coyne, Resident Physician
Nate Rinehouse, MD
Joseph Hanthorn, MD
John Choi, Resident Physician, Harbor-UCLA Medical Center
Kelsey Moffett Nursing Student, LSUHSC School of Nursing
Linda Green MD, Physician
Trenell Hugle-Alexander, Social Worker
Marui Soomro Nursing Student
Jordan Schaffer, LMSW, Social Worker
Katie Procarione, MD
Dr. Emily Fiore, Medical Doctor
Pheobe Askie MD, MPH, Crescentcare
Hayley Alexander, Project Coordinator
Nicole Catalano, LSUHSC Student, LSUHSC
Alex Niculescu, MD, Alumnus, Tulane University School of Medicine
Louis Monnig, Resident Physician
Laniece Thomas, Study Coordinator
Allison Staiger, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Highwire Therapy, LLC
Rebecca Clark, MD
Katie Hanisee, Surgeon
Blake Milson, MD, Resident Physician
Conner Hartupee, MD/MPH Candidate, LSUHSC
Elizabeth Bobo, Public Health Program Manager
Joanna Kingdon, MD
Wynn-C Kwan, MD
Dr. Bo Peng
Jacqueline Cerasaro, RN
Issa Moquete, Social Worker G. W. Carver High School
Logan Ritter, MD
Trenell Hugle-Alexander, Social Worker
Mary J Murphy, MD, Crescentcare
Laura Murray, PA-C
Chris Joplin, MD, Tulane/CHNOLA
Nadine Wu, MSW, MPH
Nia Ross, LMSW
Trenell Hugle-Alexander, Social Worker
Whitney Bembry, Chief Resident
Emily Baas, Medical Student LSUHSC
Jamilla Webb, Registered Nurse
Melissa Rubin, MD
Chloe Smith, Medical Student
Erika L Elliott, MD
Louis Kearny, Nursing Student, LSU Health New Orleans School of Nursing
Sydney Beatty, Resident
Karin Rohland, Licensed Acupuncturist
Margaret Huntwork, MD
Bruce Hinton, Physician Assistant, Crescent Care Health and Wellness Center
Donald Wathieu, MD
Jonathan Gugel, M.D.
Madeleine Hage, 4th year Medical Student, Tulane University School of Medicine
Joni Kay, Physician
Elisa Atamian, MD, Tulane SOM
Kayla McGruder, BSPH, Tulane University
Jamie Yeager, MD
Antoinette Laurel, Resident Physician
Chloe Smith, Medical Student
Nicole Catalano, LSUHSC Student
Lauren McMahan, MD
Magaly Sotres, MD Physician
Justin Cutrer, MD
Alison Neuliep, Pharmacist, University Medical Center New Orleans
Bethany LeBlanc, Social Worker (LMSW)
Katie Carsky, Physician
Joni Kay, Physician
Erin Ricketts, MD, Tulane University
Danny Brown, Paramedic, EMS
Marina Hernandez, Public Health Specialist
Destinee' Nicole Charles, CSW, Behavioral Health Professional
Janelle Cordova, Physician Assistant, Veterans Affairs
Brantlee McConaughey, Doctor
Julisa Tindall, Social Worker Ochsner Health System
Antiqua Smart, Nurse Practitioner
Alyssa Balmas, Registered Nurse
Sunny Dengle, Medical Student
Amy Wolfe, MD
Bhumi Patel, Medical Student, Tulane SOM
Elsa Thomas, M.D.
Emily Hair, Therapist
Beam Chansangavej, Internal Medicine Resident
Juliana Kuntz, Nursing Student, LSUHSC
Jasmine Hall, LCSW
Duy Dang, Physician Assistant
Vannette Jefferson, Reverend / Social Service
Yasmin Hajja, MD
Rebecca Schroll, MD
Amane Hamdan, RN, Critical Care
Nikki Strobel, CNA
Emily Cavin, BSN, RN
Allison Roberts Smith, RN
Ary Dotiwala, Surgical Resident