

June 9, 2020

Dear Mayor Durkan,

We, the Citywide Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) Change Team Co-Leads, are a group that was created to be eyes, ears, advisors and agents of undoing institutional racism in the City of Seattle. We are writing to collectively lift up the demands of Black community leaders and anti-racist organizations.

As you know, Black people in America are disproportionately killed by the police and a criminal injustice system steeped in systemic racism. The recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor as well as the local murders of Shaun Fuhr, Ryan Smith, Che Taylor, Manuel Ellis, and Charleena Lyles are recent examples in this country's long history of racist policing.

The protests that began after George Floyd's murder represent an immediate and urgent call for systemic change and Black community-based power. However, the Seattle Police Department's (SPD) forceful and unconstitutional response to these protests and your lack of public acknowledgment of this issue draw attention to and perpetuate the very violence these protests are trying to stop.

The unrelenting message from your office about outside agitators diminishes our righteous anger about racism – the very reason for our protests and demonstrations – and perpetuates a false narrative about how we could and should express our outrage about another Black death at the hands of structural violence.

As you know, the Citywide Change Team Co-Leads group is comprised of the leadership from each City department's change team. This multi-racial, multi-ethnic, intersectional group of stakeholders is an asset to the City in carrying forward the collective will and work of their change teams on matters of race and social justice. The Citywide Change Team-Co Leads are in a unique position to help City leadership understand the RSJI issues that affect employees, to articulate why employees need to do racially equitable work and to provide practical advice on how the City of Seattle can further anti-racist principles in governance and the workplace.

When you met with the Co-Leads in November of 2019, you made a commitment to work with us to dismantle the structural racism we've all faced for the last 400 years and, in so doing, avoid the very kinds of injustices we have witnessed over the ten days.

Throughout this crisis, you have invoked RSJI on multiple occasions. This is your opportunity to heed the call of the Citywide RSJI Network. As you have said, "we need to lean into our anti-racist values and call upon the resources and practices embedded in our Race and Social Justice Initiative."

RSJI exists for a reason: to apply the following principles in the Seattle City government and therefore change outcomes in our community and within our workforce. These principles are our City of Seattle RSJI application of the [People's Institute for Survival and Beyond Anti-Racist Principles](#), and are included in our RSJI 2019 – 2021 Strategic Plan:

- **Power of history:** Honor the history of racial justice organizing that birthed the Race and Social Justice Initiative.
- **City role and impact:** Understand the City of Seattle's institutional power and footprint in local communities most impacted by structural racism.
- **Accountability:** Accept responsibility for institutional actions and harm, and work to restore relationships, share information and follow-through with commitments.
- **Value community:** Value the wisdom, expertise and leadership of communities most impacted; and compensate community members for their contributions to the institution.
- **Show up for community:** Respect, support and show up for communities organizing for racial justice and systems-change.
- **Learn from community:** Center and learn from those who are burdened by the multiplicity of institutional harm.

In the spirit of embodying these principles and in solidarity with other collectives within the City of Seattle RSJI Network, we present you with the following demands in support of the communities we serve — particularly Black and brown people who continue to live in a system that literally kills them, and thus literally kills us. These are comprehensive and foundational demands that must be addressed collectively.

We center our Black community and lift up their demands and leadership. We are especially indebted to Seattle's anti-racist black network – the Village of Hope, Black Prisoner's Caucus, Youth Undoing Institutional Racism and Ending the Prison Industrial Complex – that birthed our collective and structural analysis of anti-racism. The following anti-racist community organizations represent broad community interests and success in organizing to keep their communities safe: No New Youth Jail, Decriminalize Seattle, Block the Bunker, Seattle Peoples Party, COVID-19 Mutual Aid, Trans Women of Color Solidarity Network, BAYAN USA Pacific Northwest, La Resistencia, Pacific Rim Solidarity Network (PARISOL), Chinatown International District (CID) Coalition, Asians for Black Lives and Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Awareness Group (APICAG).

We stand behind these organizations by institutionally prioritizing the following categories that encompass the three main demands of the Seattle anti-racist community:

1. Defund SPD;
2. Protect and expand City investments to make Black and brown communities safe; and
3. Significantly increase police accountability.

What follows are some of our ideas for how City government can address past and current community demands. But you must press beyond these ideas to fully comply with the

community's demands. As City employees applying an RSJI lens, we demand you examine your own whiteness, privilege, and power and *DO THE WORK* in addition to the following:

1. Defund SPD

Reduce the SPD budget and redistribute those funds to other programs, services and infrastructure using an analysis informed by the Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) process. The communities we serve and are accountable to are asking for a 50% or more reduction for SPD and an investment in community programs, services and infrastructure that ensures long term development, community-centered practices, and restorative justice. The \$100 million dollars already committed on June 6 is insufficient to adequately fund these community-based programs, services and infrastructure.

We ask that you: First, commit to already mentioned and ignored recommendations from past RETs, Black and brown community's demands and the Community Police Commission's reports. Follow through with a well-funded and staffed RET on the redistribution of these funds in consultation with listed community-based groups and other anti-racist organizations. Commit to an SPD hiring and recruitment freeze while the RET is in progress. And when the RET is concluded, commit to fulfilling its recommendations.

We strongly oppose allocating more City funding to police-related activities. What other department gets **more** money because their staff constantly messes up, and is not just incompetent, but grossly negligent in such a way as compromises public safety and human rights?

2. Protect and expand City investments to make our Black and brown communities safe

Invest in alternatives to police systems. Anti-bias trainings or other diversity and inclusion measures are not sufficient to change police systems in the United States. Divest the City from policing measures that continue to prey on Black and brown bodies. Reinvest those funds in developing alternatives that support public health, restorative justice, education and family support initiatives that invest in the well-being of communities most directly affected by structural racism.

Commit to a community participatory budget process. The anti-racist organizations named above must oversee and co-design a community-centered process to determine how the funds are reinvested.

Cease forced encampment removals and cut police from the City's Navigation Team. Police involvement in outreach criminalizes poverty. Further, tent removals exacerbate the already devastating health inequities faced by communities of color and are not successful in bridging folks to actual support. King County's houseless population is more than 32% Black and 10% Indigenous—vastly disproportionate when

compared to the racial demographics of the county's general population. Instead, invest in strategies that create housing and provide resources that help people get their basic needs met.

3. **Significantly increase police accountability**

Do not prosecute protesters. The Seattle City Attorney must not prosecute protesters.

Conduct a full review of past cases of police killings and violence by SPD. This review should be carried out in partnership with community stakeholders, advocates, racial justice organizers and community groups working toward the abolition and transformation of the present criminal punishment system into one that is rooted in justice. We recognize a need for independent oversight of SPD with civilian accountability.

Change officers' uniforms to make them easily identifiable by the community. Police must wear their last name and badge number on gear in a highly-visible manner, like sports professionals. This will allow community members to readily identify individual police officers, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Demilitarize SPD and create and enforce de-escalation protocols specific to protests, permanently. SPD's use of riot gear, tear gas, pepper spray, flash bangs and other "less-lethal weapons" creates an environment that engenders violent confrontation. Communities of color within our City of Seattle RSJI Network and within our neighborhoods have asked for demilitarization and defunding of the police force. Use of excessive force and tear gassing residential neighborhoods is unconscionable. Make no mistake, the City of Seattle is actively causing physical and emotional harm to our community. This includes infringing on the First Amendment right to assemble by using chemical and other agents that cause respiratory and other harms that exacerbate a pandemic that is disproportionately affecting Black and brown communities.

Renegotiate the SPD union contract to increase accountability. The Seattle Police Officers Guild contract perpetuates systemic racism and is a barrier to holding police accountable for their violence and brutality. The current contract contains provisions that protect police who engage in unsafe, inappropriate and unethical behavior. This contract is now in negotiation, so we call on you to ensure the new contract will demonstrate our City's values of transparency and accountability to our communities.

<https://www.checkthepolice.org/#review>

CONCLUSION

We can do better and we *must* do better. You should lead the effort to do better. Do the right thing and be accountable both to Black and brown communities in our city and in our City workforce. Until you take action on the above demands and publicly own and apologize for your

harmful actions and inactions as Mayor, we cannot move together toward racial and restorative justice.

Civil rights advocates across the country look to the City of Seattle for leadership in racial justice. Seattle birthed the first government racial equity initiative in the country; you have an obligation to uphold this legacy. What we're witnessing and experiencing is the antithesis of 16 years of RSJI. It is racial *injustice*. Your voice needs to be loud so that the way the police interacts with community changes permanently and systemically.

We call on the Mayor to be accountable to our anti-racist community and to our City of Seattle RSJI Network. We are advocates and organizers who act accountably, creatively and strategically for racial justice. We harness our multi-racial and interconnected experiences to embody the change we want to see in the world. A transparent and supportive team, we honor the best in one another, practice radical self-acceptance, and see each other as mirrors and gifts. As we grow, we grow collectively, learning from and challenging each other while centering community leadership in order to move racial justice forward.

We are the RSJI Change Team Co-Leads showing up in alignment with Black and brown communities and the rest of the Citywide RSJI network.

Mayor Durkan: Recognize community's urgency by enacting these demands. Please respond to the City of Seattle RSJI Network directly and publicly by Wednesday, June 10th or sooner.

Additionally, please respond to No New Youth Jail, Decriminalize Seattle, Block the Bunker, Seattle Peoples Party, COVID-19 Mutual Aid, Trans Women of Color Solidarity Network, BAYAN USA Pacific Northwest, La Resistencia, Pacific Rim Solidarity Network (PARISOL), Chinatown International District (CID) Coalition, Asians for Black Lives and Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Awareness Group (APICAG) whose thoughtful organizing produced the foundation of this letter by Wednesday, June 10th or sooner.

In our power,

*Citywide Change Team Co-Leads

The growing list of signatories on this letter represent a wide swath of city employees involved in racial justice efforts throughout the City:

Anti-Harassment Interdepartmental Team

Anti-Racist Educators (ARE) Training Group

CANOES

Citywide AAPI for Racial Equity

Citywide Equity Leads

Citywide Organizers for Racial Equity (CORE Team): 3, 4, & 5

Department of Education and Early Learning Change Team
Department of Transportation Latinx Group
FACES Affinity Group
*Human Resources Change Team
Members of CORE Team 1
Members of CORE Team 2
Members of Seattle Office for Civil Rights RET Team
Members of Seattle Public Utilities Anti-Racist White Caucus
Office of Arts & Culture Change Team Co-Leads
Office for Civil Rights Change Team
Office for Civil Rights RSJI Strategy Team
Office of Housing Change Team Co-leads
Office of Labor Standards Change Team Co-leads
Office of Sustainability and Environment Change Team
Office of Sustainability and Environment POC Affinity Group
RSJI Affiliates
SDOT Anti-Racist White Allies
SDOT RISE API Affinity Group
*Seattle Public Library Change Team
Seattle Silence Breakers
SPU African American Affinity Group
SPU Project Delivery and Engineering Branch Equity Team

**Groups with an asterisk next to their names indicate that group reached a quorum in favor of signing but were unable to have all members fully discuss this letter before personally agreeing to sign.*