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NHS Statement on the Murder of George Floyd

The senseless murders of unarmed black men and women by police have become a pattern in our country that require new paradigms to bring about meaningful change. Over the past 6 years since the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, it seems the cycle remains the same – there is police involved murder followed by protests and calls for change. Then, elected officials stand up and clap for both protestors and police while promising reforms which never come. It is time to entirely rethink how we spend our resources to bring about an end to systemic racism.

Just five years ago in Baltimore, our community experienced the senseless death of Freddie Gray at the hands of police. Let's look at some of the realities that foster the frustration and anger experienced by the African American community. The police treatment of citizens is starkly different in more affluent white neighborhoods compared to less affluent black neighborhoods. One third of black men have felony convictions significantly impacting opportunities and reflecting the inequality within our criminal justice system. For many, the physical conditions of their communities are extremely poor according to every metric. Disinvestment into communities over the last 100 years is the direct result of federal, state, and local policies that were designed to keep African American communities oppressed and have resources redirected into more affluent white communities. This is the direct result of racism. Jobs and opportunities have bypassed large sections of Baltimore. Much of the corporate workforce employed in Baltimore does not reside in the city. Resources are directed to attracting businesses to Baltimore in hope that a handful of jobs trickle down to city residents. It is time for a new approach!

For far too long a significant portion of spending has supported a criminal justice system that continues to fail. It is time to reallocate resources away from police, prosecutors, and prisons to invest in people and places. It is time to prioritize funding for youth programs including after school and summer employment opportunities. It is time to adequately fund workforce development designed to provide quality job skills and connect residents to employment. It is time to invest into Baltimore communities in a meaningful way by addressing the blight that plagues many of our neighborhoods. Without this level of meaningful change, the patterns of racism evidenced by our past will continue into the future. How an entity allocates its spending is the best indication of its priorities. It is far time we change our priorities.

NHS of Baltimore expanded our work in 2015 in response to requests from residents who asked for help following the Freddie Gray uprising in 2015. We targeted the Greater Mondawmin and Greater Rosemont communities, worked with residents to identify priority projects and secured the financial resources to help them implement these projects. In addition, we coordinated



training opportunities that helped to build the capacity of community leaders, residents and youth in areas of community leadership and advocacy. Through partnership and direct investment, NHS has brought over \$30 million of investment to those neighborhoods resulting in affordable housing, commercial opportunities, and neighborhood improvement projects. While we have plans in place for an additional \$50 million in investment over the next 5 years, we realize that this will not be enough to counter the impacts of decades of disinvestment.

As we look at the next five years, NHS will commit to further expanding resident representation on our board of directors. NHS will also increase our investment goal working with our partners to invest and leverage an additional \$100 million in Greater Mondawmin and Greater Rosemont communities. NHS will advocate for a major shift in funding priorities of the city and state shifting resources away from the failed criminal justice system and to community building and resident serving priorities. NHS of Baltimore, its board and staff, will continue to invest in our people and our city. We will do more!

On a personal note, as a white man leading a multi-racial organization in Baltimore City, I am deeply committed to using my own privilege to provide access and opportunity to my African American brothers and sisters. I refuse to remain silent while injustice plagues our friends and neighbors. I will lead NHS in advocating for a redeployment of government funding away from failed policing strategies that have not served our community well for a long time. Making choices to invest in education, youth services, job training, and community development rather than a failed criminal justice system is the path forward. I am choosing to join the chorus of voices calling for an end to systemic racism. Silence is not an option. It is time for change!

Dan Ellis
Executive Director
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