

**Integrated Services of Kalamazoo**  
**Blacks Lives Matter Position Statement**  
Jeff Patton, Chief Executive Officer  
**January 4, 2021**

Introduction

On June 2, 2020, racial justice advocates marched through downtown Kalamazoo in response to the killing of George Floyd, some of whom identified themselves as members or supporters of the Black Lives Matter organization or movement. On that day, Kalamazoo Public Safety Chief Karianne Thomas announced a 7 p.m. curfew, and the Michigan National Guard in partnership with the Michigan State Police responded to a request from Kalamazoo civil authorities to ensure peace, augment local law enforcement, mitigate property damage, and reassure safety for community members. According to Chief Thomas, six people in Kalamazoo were arrested Monday night (June 2nd) and early Tuesday morning (June 3rd), and one officer was injured amid looting and vandalism that occurred after hours of peaceful protests throughout Kalamazoo County. She further reported that twenty-five Kalamazoo businesses and buildings were damaged overnight. According to news reports, Kalamazoo Public Safety officers fired tear gas into a group lying on the ground. The rationale given was that outside agitators forced officers to deploy tear gas and pepper spray.

In sharp contrast, on August 15, 2020, the community watched members of the Proud Boys organization march through downtown Kalamazoo waving American Flags and holding up white power signals, and chanting ‘blue lives matter’, with no Kalamazoo Public Safety curfew announcements or requests for assistance from the Michigan National Guard or Michigan State Police. The Proud Boys is a far-right, neo-fascist and male-only political organization that promotes and engages in political violence in the United States and Canada. While the group officially rejects racism, several members have been known to promote positions supporting white supremacy, and the Proud Boys has been described by US intelligence organizations as "a dangerous white supremacist group.”

What was apparently different about how this march was handled in comparison to the June 2<sup>nd</sup> protest march, is that public safety officers were dispatched to the scene after the initial violent altercation between the Proud Boys and counter protesters. There were 111 officers on duty for the Proud Boys march, and public safety officers took a few minutes to respond. According to Chief Karianne Thomas, “it was a strategic decision” ... “We knew there would be delays moving in, but we had made contact several times that week with the counter protest organizer who kept telling us it was going to be a peaceful protest.”

It has been reported that the City of Kalamazoo has requested an outside investigation to determine the appropriateness of the Kalamazoo Public Safety responses during both protests. We respectfully await the outcome of this investigation to determine not only appropriateness of the contrasting responses, but also ways for increased transparency, trust, and strategies that the community will embrace for the handling of future protests that are guaranteed by law.

Notwithstanding the outcome of the Kalamazoo Public Safety investigations, it is quite apparent that the preparation for each protest march was considerably different. Why? Was the Black Lives Matter march considered to be a greater threat to public safety than the Proud Boys march? This is a very important question because the Black Lives Matter movement stresses the point that “Black Lives” have never mattered throughout the history in this country. Their argument is that “White Lives” have always mattered and it is time to recognize that racism in the United States persists, that racism is harmful, and that racism must be addressed and ended.

### Black Lives Matter – Organization and Background

The uproar surrounding the local handling of the two protest marches in Kalamazoo, and the national and worldwide outcry against police brutality and killings of African Americans in this country, prompted stakeholders and staff of Integrated Services of Kalamazoo to ask where Integrated Services of Kalamazoo stands with respect to the Black Lives Matter movement, and ending racism and racial health disparities. As we consider and answer these very important questions, it is important to first clarify our basic understanding of the Black Lives Matter movement and why we support its purpose to eliminate racism in general and police brutality against African Americans in particular, and why we emphatically declare that *Black Lives do Matter*.

Black Lives Matter is a decentralized movement advocating for non-violent civil disobedience in protest against incidents of police brutality and all racially motivated violence against Black people. In July 2013, the movement began with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African American teen Trayvon Martin 17 months earlier, in February 2012. The movement became nationally recognized for street demonstrations following the 2014 deaths of two African Americans: Michael Brown—resulting in protests and unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, a city near St. Louis—and Eric Garner in New York City. Since the Ferguson protests, participants in the movement have demonstrated against the deaths of numerous other African Americans by police actions or while in police custody. Timelines for highly publicized black deaths caused by police are listed below:

- Michael Brown, August 9, 2014
- Tamir Rice, November 22, 2014
- Walter Scott, April 4, 2015
- Alton Sterling, July 5, 2016
- Stephon Clark, March 18, 2018
- Breonna Taylor, March 13, 2020
- Andre Maurice Hill, December 22, 2020

While these individuals’ deaths were widely reported, the unfortunate truth is that many other deaths of Black Americans due to police actions and actions by other racially motivated individuals are not reported to or known by the public.

## Racial Realities in America

Clearly, Integrated Services of Kalamazoo believes that all human lives are precious and matter. This is reflected in our vision, mission and values statements provided below:

### **Vision**

We provide a welcoming and diverse community partnership which collaborates and shares effective resources that support individuals and families to be successful through all phases of life.

### **Mission**

We promote and provide mental health, intellectual/developmental disability and substance use disorder resources that empower people to succeed.

### **Values**

Community, Competence, Diversity, Effectiveness, Integrity, Leadership, Recovery and Self-Determination, Respect, Responsibility, Teamwork, Trust.

However, the contrasting Kalamazoo Public Safety reactions to the two separate protests that took place in downtown Kalamazoo on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and August 15<sup>th</sup> warrants a pause and thoughtful reflection for why Black lives matter. The historical truth is that *Black lives* have never really *mattered* in this country and the world is telling us that they should matter, and that racism needs to come to an end.

We know that many express concerns or are offended when separating out Black Americans from other racial, ethnic and minority groups. In reaction to the protests in major cities, some prominent presidential candidates received considerable *push back* when trying to convey to their audiences that all lives matter, including white lives. The reason for this *push back* is that in reality, white lives in this country have always mattered. Anna Galland, executive director of MoveOn, spoke about this in a public statement:

“The presidential candidates’ responses today to the powerful protest led by black activists at Netroots Nation ... make clear that all Democratic candidates have work to do in understanding and addressing the movement for black lives. “Saying that ‘all lives matter’ or ‘white lives matter’ immediately after saying ‘black lives matter’ minimizes and draws attention away from the specific, distinct ways in which black lives have been devalued by our society and in which black people have been subject to state and other violence.”

We clearly understand this point of view and agree with this distinction because of the 401-year history of struggle for black people in this country to acquire basic human rights and equality, beginning with the arrival of the first African captives to the Jamestown Colony in 1619. This is frequently recognized by historians as the beginning of slavery in America, although enslaved Africans had arrived in North America as early as the 1500s. Racism has not been eliminated in this country, and we do not know if there will ever be a public will to totally eliminate it.

W.E.B. Dubois famously asserted that “*the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line*” Sadly, this remains an existential threat for our nation in the twenty-first century.

What is clear to us, however, as Anthony Appiah expresses in his book, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity*, is that a person’s fate can be determined by what the dominant group in any society decides to assign her or him:

...And throughout the twentieth century your fate could be determined by the decisions that other people made as to which people you belonged to. Many of the genocides of the twentieth century—against Turkey’s Armenians, Europe’s Jews, and Rwanda’s Tutsis—were perpetuated in the name of one people against another with the aim of securing a homogenous nation (p. 379).

Appiah further points out three historical difficulties for building a nation that has heterogeneous populations:

...The logic of shared ancestry offers only three possible answers: annihilate them, expel them (along with all others of separate ancestry), or assimilate them, inventing a story of common ancestry to cover up the problem (p. 381).

The difficulties in assimilating African Americans in this country is well stated in James Baldwin’s acclaimed book, *The Fire Next Time*. He describes the struggles a member of his family tragically encountered as a Black man living in the United States:

...I know what the world has done to my brother and how narrowly he has survived it. And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. One can be, indeed one must become, tough and philosophical concerning destruction and death, for this is what most of mankind has been best at since we have heard of man. (But remember: most of mankind is not *all* of mankind.) But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime (1963, pp. 5 and 6).

The so-called innocence Baldwin described is still being played out through the emerging public reaction and anxiety regarding the changing demographics in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau a majority of the U.S. population will be nonwhite by the year 2050, about half of Americans say this shift will lead to more conflicts between racial and ethnic groups. The Pew Research Center states that “...As the U.S. population becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, Americans have mixed views about how the country might change when Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and other minorities make up a majority of the population. While more say this change will be good for the country than it will be bad, the predominant view is that it will be neither.” (Pew Research Center, *Social & Demographic Trends*, March 21, 2019.)

## Reflections on Race from the U.S. Constitution and Supreme Court Decisions

One way for “*feeling the pulse*” or “*gaging the temperature*” for where this country stands in ending racism and racial inequalities is to examine the original and contemporary statements expressed in the United States Constitution and in United States Supreme Court rulings. It is clear that those statements do not reflect an unbroken line of progress toward racial equality.

In today’s world, it seems unimaginable to reflect back to the time of slavery when Black men and women had no rights whatsoever. The 1857 United States Supreme Court decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* rejected the abolition of slavery and determined Black people, whether free or in bondage, had no legal rights under the United States Constitution. This was followed by the Civil War beginning in 1861. After the Union’s victory in 1865, the *Dred Scott* ruling was voided by the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which abolished slavery except as punishment for a crime, and the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed citizenship for “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof.”

The Civil Rights Act of 1875 was enacted during the Reconstruction era in response to civil rights violations against African Americans. Moving further ahead in time the 1896 United States Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld a Louisiana Jim Crow law that required segregation of blacks and whites on railroads and mandated separate railway cars for members of the two races. In 1954, in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, the Supreme Court declared that school segregation was unconstitutional. The Voting Rights Act became federal law in 1965, prohibiting racial discrimination in voting. Then affirmative action in the United States became a set of laws, policies, guidelines, and administrative practices intended to end and correct the effects of specific forms of discrimination that include government-mandated, government-approved, and voluntary private programs. The programs tend to focus on access to education and employment, granting special consideration to historically excluded groups, specifically racial minorities, and women.

In the years since those court decisions and the passage of those laws there have been serious challenges to affirmative action that threaten to roll back the progress that sought to grant Black Americans equal access to necessary resources and to address past injustices. For example, in 1978 the United States Supreme Court decided *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, which upheld affirmative action allowing race to be one of several factors in college admission policies, but ruled that specific racial quotas were impermissible. In 2003, the Supreme Court held in *Grutter v. Bollinger* that a student admissions process at the University of Michigan Law School that favored “underrepresented minority groups” did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause so long as it considered other factors evaluated on an individual basis for every applicant. It is important to mention here that in this case, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, writing for the Court, said she expected that in 25 years, racial preferences would no longer be necessary. While the clock is ticking to see whether her seemingly prophetic statement will hold true, the continued recent challenges to affirmative action continues to put it in doubt.

A federal appeals court on Thursday, November 12, 2020 agreed with a lower court ruling that Harvard University does not intentionally discriminate against prospective Asian American students, finding that Harvard's limited use of race in its admissions process in order to achieve diversity "is consistent with the requirements of Supreme Court precedent." What is concerning about this case is that the Trump administration-backed lawsuit could be the Supreme Court's next opening to further restrict, or even ban, affirmative action.

This brief synopsis of race-related laws and court decisions is by no means a full recitation of the historic treatment of this subject. A more detailed summary of constitutional interpretations and United States Supreme Court rulings is provided in the attachment to this paper.

### Literary Reflections on Race in America

Race, and the equality of people under the law has been considered by authors throughout our nation's history. Isabel Wilkerson, the author of *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, correctly places the term racism in a much broader context that links the caste systems of America, India, and Nazi Germany. She offers hope, however, and calls for a collective will to bring an end to racism and America's caste system:

The tyranny of caste is that we are judged on the very things we cannot change: a chemical in the epidermis, the shape of one's facial features, the signposts on our bodies of gender and ancestry—superficial differences that have nothing to do with who we are inside. The caste system in America is four hundred years old and will not be dismantled by a single law or any one person, no matter how powerful. We have seen in the years since the civil rights era that laws, like the Voting Rights Act of 1965, can be weakened if there is not the collective will to maintain them. A caste system persists in part because we, each and every one of us, allow it to exist—in large and small ways, in how we elevate or demean, embrace or exclude, on the basis of the meaning attached to people's physical traits. If enough people buy into the lie of natural hierarchy, then it becomes the truth or is assumed to be. Once awakened, we then have a choice. We can be born to the dominant caste but choose not to dominate. We can be born to a subordinated caste but resist the box others force upon us. And all of us can sharpen our powers of discernment to see past the external and to value the character of a person rather than demean those who are already marginalized or worship those born to false pedestals. We need not bristle when those deemed subordinate break free but rejoice that here may be one more human being who can add their true strengths to humanity (pp. 379 and 380).

It is important to note here that the notion of a caste system in the United States is not new. When Senator Jacob Howard introduced the final version of the 1868 Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amend to the United State Constitution, he explained the following:

"It protects the black man in his fundamental rights as a citizen with the same shield which it throws over the white man. Ought not the time to be now passed when one measure of justice is to be meted out to a member of one caste while another and a different measure is meted out to the member of another caste, both castes being alike citizens of the United States, both bound to

obey the same laws, to sustain the burdens of the same Government, and both equally responsible to justice and to God for the deeds in the body?"

Although Wilkerson's words contain hope for ending racism and America's caste system, they also envision enormous change. What is at stake here is not isolated towards merely ending racism per se, but preserving humanity, freedom, and democracy in this country. Nearly sixty years ago, Baldwin warned us of the destiny that lies ahead if we do not embrace this necessary change:

...in the end, it is the threat of universal extinction hanging over all the world today that changes, totally and forever, the nature of reality and brings into devastating question the true meaning of man's history. We human beings now have the power to exterminate ourselves; this seems to be the entire sum of our achievement (Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963), pp. 55 and 57)

A collective will to end racism and America's caste system is possible but may take another generation or two to fully accomplish. The reason for this is that although many Americans, and hopefully the majority of younger people, may be committed to ending racism, our nation which was built upon and has continued to sustain itself on the very idea of discriminating against not only black people, but other racial and ethnic groups, women, individuals because of their sexual orientation and gender identification, and people with disabilities, will have to be disrupted in order to make necessary core changes to our country's historical characteristics.

### ISK's Position on Ending Racism

Integrated Services of Kalamazoo believes that *Black lives matter* and is committed to ending racism, racial disparities and discrimination in health care and the mental health system. We recognize that we have work to do within Integrated Services of Kalamazoo. Racial disparities that need to be addressed in Kalamazoo's public community mental health system are shown in the charts attached to this paper. We pledge to focus on them, and to formulate action plans to end those disparities.

We also join the Kalamazoo County Government in declaring racism a public health crisis, and the American Public Health Association, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American College of Emergency Physicians, each of which have declared institutional racism to be an urgent public health issue and have vowed to eradicate racism and discrimination in health care.

We also join the State of Michigan Office of Governor, Executive Directive No. 2020.9 to declare that:

- Racism is a social system with multiple dimensions, including individual racism, which is internalized and interpersonal, and systemic racism, which is institutional or structural. Both institutional and systemic racism harm individuals and communities and deplete the strength of a whole society through the waste of human resources.

- Racism has existed in America for over 400 years. From the genocide of Indigenous peoples upon the arrival of the Europeans, to chattel slavery beginning in the 1600s, to the Jim Crow era. Even today, through inequitable outcomes in the criminal justice system, achievement gaps in education, disproportionate results in health and infant mortality, and job and housing discrimination, racism remains a presence in American society while subjecting Black, Indigenous, and other people of color to hardships and disadvantages in every aspect of life.
- Historical racism in Michigan has affected people who reside in the state. For example, discriminatory housing practices in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as redlining and exclusionary housing covenants, contributed to segregation and created an obstacle to the transfer of generational wealth.
- People of color in Michigan are more likely to live in neighborhoods with restricted access to healthy food choices and essential resources, excessive high-priced gas stations and liquor stores, and older housing stock leading to a variety of other health issues, including reduced life expectancy, higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, high rates of asthma, higher rates of lead poisoning, and higher vulnerabilities to public pandemics including COVID-19.
- In addition to having an independent influence on the social determinants of health, racism in and of itself has broad-reaching and direct negative impacts on individual health outcomes.

### Conclusion

The United States of America as a nation, and Americans individually, clearly have much work to do to build a country free from inequality. And there is much to do in that regard within our public mental health system. Stating that *Black lives matter*, whether anyone agrees with the actions of the Black Lives Matter organization, is merely an acknowledgement that all lives in America do not matter unless we address the unequal treatment and unequal opportunities faced by Black Americans. Integrated Services of Kalamazoo pledges to continue to identify and address inequalities within our programs, system of care and procedures, and we support individuals and organizations who are willing to speak out for the goal of equal treatment for all.