As part of our Commitment to Racial Equity and in light of the racial justice awakening in this country, Funders Together is sharing statements, articles, and other resources that highlight the voices of Black leaders in the fields of philanthropy, homelessness, and intersecting systems. While it’s important for white leaders to speak up, we can further our commitments to racial equity by listening to, learning from, and incorporating the recommendations of Black leadership into not only our grantmaking but also into the structures of our organizations.

At Funders Together, we stress the importance of cross-systems collaboration and participating in policy and advocacy as necessary steps to achieve racial and housing justice. In her recent personal reflection, President of the Melville Charitable Trust and Funders Together board member Susan Thomas, discusses how our nation's policies impact Black and Brown communities, and the connection between healthcare, housing, low wages and homelessness.

In a nation where the lack of affordable housing has already contributed to homelessness, COVID-19’s impact on the economy will only deepen this issue as many Americans are unable to pay rent and may soon face eviction. To further this issue, Susan makes clear the potential impact of continued failed attempts to pass subsequent COVID-19 relief packages by Congress, and the misaligned and poorly prioritized values by lawmakers.
Susan draws the line between the potential overturn of the Affordable Care Act to the impact that would have on BIPOC communities. To dismantle the Affordable Care Act, or even consider it, in the face of a pandemic, would further cut off Americans from healthcare. During this economic crisis and in a system where jobs are necessary for healthcare, any removal of affordable healthcare options is just furthering economic crisis, which in turn just furthers the homelessness crisis.

She also highlights the conflicting nature of claiming to defend life while also ignoring the crises of poverty and homelessness. She writes: “In their defense of life, I wish those same brothers and sisters would get just as angry about the 170,000 families with children who don’t have a home in which to “shelter in place” and the 1 out of 5 Black households that do not have enough to eat. I wish they would be just as incredulous about the 6 million households who make less than $15,000 a year and pay half of that income on rent alone. I want to see some outrage over the estimated 30-40 million who, as a result of the pandemic, are behind on their rent and may be evicted while lawmakers squabble over what constitutes adequate relief.”

Susan calls on us to face any contradictions in our values and actions, while also reminding us of the necessity of policy and advocacy work within philanthropy. As funders working to end homelessness, we know philanthropy’s dollars cannot fill gaps in funding and that it is vital to have both government funding and strong policies in place that center racial justice. Susan makes clear that our work is far from over. Deepening our foundations’ policy and advocacy work is needed to ensure that values are aligned and a racial equity lens is in place for all policy that our lawmakers consider.

Read Susan’s full statement.

Funders Together to End Homelessness
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