

Good afternoon. I want to thank the organizers for inviting me to speak and you all for being here as we raise awareness of this most important issue. As the Executive Director of SJNC, I am proud that our organization has taken a leadership role in our community's Racial Equity and Justice initiative (REJI).

REJI's core focus is to identify, address and dismantle racism at the internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels. Only through dismantling this system can we become an equitable society. And we believe that essential to accomplishing this goal is engaging institutions in examining their own policies and rooting out the insidious practices that allow inequities in pay to persist.

Achieving racial equity demands achieving pay equity. As we recognize the 400 years since the first enslaved Africans were sold to Virginia colonist, we must acknowledge that the labor of people of African descent continues to be devalued.

And I dare say that this is not by chance, or the mere outcome of failed systems, but that it is by design. The systems are working well, and they are producing the outcomes they were intended to produce.

The racist policies and structural barriers that have been in place since before this country's founding continues to keep African American's at the lowest rungs of society.

Black women's lived experiences make clear that we have to combat structural barriers to equal pay. As long as the wage gap persists, this country will never reach its true potential.

In this community, our institutions must:

Examine the hiring practices that prevent many Black women from entering the workforce,

Interrogate the lack of professional development and advancement opportunities that keep Black women in low-waged, labor intensive positions,

And Challenge the evaluation and merit systems that are used to justify stagnant wages and lack of promotional opportunities for Black women.

We cannot wait another 400 years to undo this system; we cannot wait one more day. The time for pay equity and racial justice is right now!

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