The cracks of structural racism are erupting as earthquakes in Black and other communities of color.

We must repair the cracks and build a new foundation.
From the ravaging of Black and other communities of color by the coronavirus pandemic, to case after case of brutal violence from racist policing, we are seeing our very foundation erupt into earthquakes from the deeply embedded cracks of structural racism.

Marching in the streets is the necessary response. It is a beautiful response. And it is an inevitable response to generations of violence and harm.

America is sick with the virus of racism. We see it in the persistent disparities in wealth. In the persistent discrimination in criminal justice. In the persistent attempts to suppress the vote. And in the persistent violence by police on Black bodies.

All of these things are true right here in New Jersey, where Black people face some of the worst racial disparities in America.

While we rightly focus on urgently reimagining policing and what Black communities need to feel protected and safe, we must also keep our eye on the larger picture — on the pressure that has built up from the widespread cracks of structural racism.

We must repair these cracks and build a new foundation if we are ever to become a nation that lives up to its promise. A nation where Black lives really matter.

The national outpouring of determination gives us hope.

Now let’s turn that hope into change.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION IN THE 10 FOLLOWING WAYS.

POLICING: CENTERING THE COMMUNITY TO TRANSFORM PUBLIC SAFETY

1. ADVOCATE TO URGE YOUR LEGISLATORS TO SPEND YOUR TAX DOLLARS IN A WAY THAT SERVES THE COMMUNITY

This moment is bringing into stark relief how the limitations of modern-day policing have failed to keep our communities safe.

We must reduce the footprint of policing in our communities by eliminating police enforcement of non-serious offenses; developing first responder and crisis intervention systems that rely on highly trained professionals other than police; funding restorative justice programs; putting more counselors and teachers—not police—in schools; and funding institutions that empower communities like schools, hospitals, libraries and parks. By developing alternative systems to over-policing, we can eliminate unnecessary interactions that lead to violence and death. We must also demilitarize the police. Each year America spends more than 100 billion dollars on police departments with some cities dedicating as much as half of their budget to law enforcement, with billions spent on military-grade equipment.

Make sure that each dollar your legislators spend promotes the interests of our kids and communities. Scrutinize the militarization levels of law enforcement in every county in America, including all New Jersey counties, here and, if necessary, urge your local law enforcement agency to demilitarize.
**ADVOCATE FOR CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICE IN ANY POLICE REFORM EFFORT**

Law enforcement should be guided by policies and trainings that are created and implemented through engagement with community members. It is critical that community members know, are familiar with, and deeply influence these policies and trainings to hold the police accountable. You can learn how Newark, New Jersey, is using policies and trainings to improve its law enforcement agency in response to a federal consent decree [here].

**ADVOCATE TO BAN AND CRIMINALIZE POLICE USE OF CHOKEHOLDS**

We all watched, heartbroken, as George Floyd, an unarmed, handcuffed Black man, was killed by a white police officer who knelt on his neck for almost nine minutes. Since this heartbreaking, galvanizing moment, Minneapolis has agreed to ban the use of chokeholds by police. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has also called for such a ban, and the New York Legislature recently passed legislation doing so. All states should do the same. Urge your state legislators to pass legislation banning and criminalizing the use of chokeholds. In New Jersey, the Attorney General recently issued guidance banning chokeholds except when deadly force is necessary. New Jersey must go further and ban all police use of chokeholds. Urge your legislators to do so [here].

**ADVOCATE FOR THE CLOSURE OF YOUTH PRISONS AND REINVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT**

The over-policing of Black kids has led to their disproportionate incarceration in our nation’s broken youth justice system. New Jersey has the worst Black to white youth incarceration disparity rate in the nation, with a Black child 21 times more likely to be locked up than a white child—even though Black and white kids commit most offenses at similar rates. And this racialized system is also expensive: New Jersey spends $300,000 to incarcerate each child in a state youth prison each year. Urge your local legislators to introduce legislation to close youth prisons.

The New Jersey Legislature has introduced the New Jersey Youth Justice Transformation Act, which would close New Jersey’s youth prisons and invest funds into community-based youth programming and services. Support it [here].

**ADVOCATE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNITY-BASED SYSTEM OF CARE FOR YOUTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

To ensure that young people can flourish and thrive at home with their families and never touch the youth justice system, we must resource communities and coordinate available youth programs and services. The COVID-19 outbreak has further shed light on the urgent need to invest in community-based solutions that build up kids, rather than youth prisons that can’t keep our kids safe.

To learn how you can develop a community-centered system of care for young people in your neighborhood, city or county, learn about the Institute’s community engagement initiative [here]. To help protect NJ’s incarcerated youth from COVID-19, take action [here].

**DEMOCRACY & JUSTICE: VOTE AND BE COUNTED**

**REGISTER TO VOTE AND HOST A CANDIDATES’ FORUM**

This is one of the most consequential election years in a generation.

In the throes of the coronavirus pandemic, it is more important now than ever that we are all civically engaged, informed and able to vote for elected officials aligned with our interests. If you haven’t already, register to vote [here] and commit to getting 10 other people registered, as well.

In addition to the critical federal election, New Jersey has several other important races coming up. To learn more about each candidate before you cast a vote, host a candidates’ forum (virtually, for the time being) with other members of your community. Learn more about how to do so [here].
BE COUNTED! TAKE THE CENSUS

The federal government allocates over $700 billion to state and local governments based on Census data, and the Census count will also determine how many members of the House of Representatives and the number of votes in the Electoral College each state will receive. If you haven’t already, complete the Census here and encourage 10 others to do so as well.

The Census count is particularly important in traditionally hard-to-count areas, in which over half of Black people in New Jersey live. Newark and Jersey City rank first and second in the nation, respectively, for their percentages of Black people living in hard-to-count areas. Find out more information on New Jersey’s hard-to-count regions here, and pledge to take the Census by texting Pledge or Censo (Spanish) to 973-348-6688.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE: CREATE OPPORTUNITY AND REPAIR HARM

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR STATE TO PUBLICLY RELEASE COVID-19-RELATED DATA BY RACE, ETHNICITY AND GENDER

Systemic inequities in our society have led to health disparities that are seeing Black and other people of color disproportionately getting sick and dying from COVID-19. To understand the impact that the pandemic has had on these communities, and what investments will be necessary to repair and rebuild them, we need data. Urge your legislators to introduce legislation to make this data available.

In New Jersey, in response to legislation, the NJ Department of Health (DOH) has started releasing some data—available here—but is still missing COVID-19 data broken down by race, ethnicity and gender at the municipal and county level. Call DOH here (609-292-7838) to urge them to immediately release this data.

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CITY TO CREATE A GUARANTEED INCOME PROGRAM

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the need to build an economic system that empowers Black and other communities of color—communities that were already in a crisis before the pandemic. To make sure that all residents of your city have the economic resources to weather the current pandemic and beyond, urge your local legislators to create a guaranteed income program.

To learn more about how a guaranteed income program could be implemented in New Jersey or nationwide, read the recent report authored by the City of Newark’s Guaranteed Income Task Force here.

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR LEGISLATORS TO PASS REPARATIONS LEGISLATION

Every state must, finally, take responsibility for its role in American slavery, and build a system that makes deep, reparative investments in Black communities that continue to confront the enduring effects of America’s original sin. But neither America, nor any state, has yet to take this critical first step toward reconciliation. To begin to repair the harm caused by America’s original sin, call your local legislators and ask them to introduce reparations legislation.

New Jersey introduced legislation (S-322/A-711) to create a reparations task force to urge the State of New Jersey to take responsibility for its role in American slavery and implement transformative policies to move the Garden State toward racial equity. Support the legislation here.