

## **Being black in America has been said to be a death sentence.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed systemic, problematic practices enforced in this country that has disproportionately affected the black community. An inappropriate response was seen in the context of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter protests. When given warning about the oncoming virus, healthcare institutions across the nation were not prepared due to the lack of protective gear, hospital beds, and other forms of preparedness. When peaceful protests erupted across the country as a response to the recent police violence against George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others, there was a swift response with responders in full protective gear and weaponry. This clearly shows a disconnect between our priorities as Americans. For centuries the black community has suffered for far too long especially in areas of healthcare and police response.

Racism has become embedded in many fields either openly or underlyingly which proves to accumulate burdens the Black American community faces. Cultural ignorance in the context of healthcare can be dangerous. Studies have shown that healthcare workers downplay the complaints and needs of black patients. This ultimately leads to poor quality healthcare given to patients and higher preventable deaths. COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting Black Americans because they are not given equal opportunity as other Americans. Turned away from testing sites and symptoms being minimized are just two of many issues they are facing. Many make up the essential workforce and are expected to work during this pandemic putting their health at risk without paid sick leave or savings for time off. Guidelines of social distancing cannot be applied to black and brown communities due to the tendency of living in densely populated areas with more people per household. Black Americans are twice as likely to know someone who has tested positive or died from COVID-19 whereas other races cannot say the same. Data has shown that they make up a small percentage of the total U.S. population, however, make up a large percentage, compared to other races, that have tested positive or died from COVID-19.

Priorities lie within budgets and a meaningful change to be made is to distribute funds to programs, services, and other initiatives that will better help the community. Defunding the police and allocating funds to public health initiatives, youth services, and other community efforts is an action needed immediately. It is outrageous to be told that advances in healthcare, education, and other community needs cannot be met due to budget crises when the majority of funds are given to police despite their history of violence and harm to communities. To Representative Bonnie Coleman, will you stand up against the systemic racism and oppression seen for centuries? Will you introduce policy reform and defund the police to address the needs of the community?