



A MESSAGE FROM THE STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR HIV ELIMINATION

As the world struggles in the grip of a novel virus, painfully historic conflicts about race and systemic racism are erupting with overwhelming force across our nation and here at home. These are agonizing, angering, mournful times for all people of good conscience, and more so for the communities directly impacted. Yet, there is also a sense of hope as people gather in record numbers to unite against racism in all its forms and commit to working to honor and protect human life.

Recent atrocities toward George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery point out the need to be intentional in our efforts to improve the lives of African American people. These senseless acts of violence call us to be steadfast in our support of equality and equity.

COVID-19 has once again highlighted the chronic health and racial disparities faced by African Americans – mirroring the long-term trend with HIV.

The staff of the Fulton County Department for HIV Elimination remain firm in our commitment to Ending the HIV Epidemic – which means ending the HIV epidemic among African American people. We cannot do this without addressing institutionalized racism and implicit bias which impact the ways in which people seek and receive care. We will work with the community by continuing to remove these barriers. With our partners we will address the social determinants that impact health outcomes among the people we serve.

One of the greatest strengths of the Ryan White Program is the inclusion of community – particularly People Living with HIV – in creating a system of care to meet the needs identified by the community. This is vital to establishing a culture of fair and equitable care and ultimately the elimination of HIV. Dr. Laura Cheever and Heather Hauck, who administer HRSA's Ryan White Programs, shared a message with all Ryan White communities: *"We hope we can draw on our collective feelings of grief and outrage over recent events to recommit ourselves to the mission of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program and continue to embrace a culture of inclusion, equity, and respect for all."*

In reflecting on recent events, Niger Thomas, Director, Fulton County Department of Diversity and Civil Rights Compliance, eloquently stated: *"Public service has never been more challenging or demanding. We are weary and worn, but be assured, we are not broken. We can meet this moment of inhumanity with love, empathy, compassion and a commitment to justice. We are confronting a history we did not choose, but we will decide the future."*

Let us continue to work together to build a more just future as we End the HIV Epidemic.