



*Episcopal Diocese of Rochester*

July 1, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
56<sup>th</sup> Governor of New York State  
New York State Capitol  
State Street and Washington Avenue  
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Greetings from the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester!

We would like to take this opportunity to commend you for bringing to public attention the harsh reality that minority communities are at the forefront of this pandemic because they make up the majority of our essential workforce (low-wage health care workers, fast food workers, hospitality industry, etc.). We applaud your vows to investigate the racial disparities in deaths from COVID-19 and to collect more comprehensive data on the spread of the virus in minority communities.

As we are all keenly aware, this disaster recalls other national and health disasters: this pandemic has exacted greater human costs and a higher death rate in people of color. The ultimate harsh reality is that the impact of COVID-19 on people of color points to our nation's deeply entrenched systematic racism and structural injustices that have been with us since the founding of this country. Unfortunately, ongoing policies and practices in our nation and the state of New York have left overwhelming racial inequities across the board: education, economic opportunity, housing, income, and net wealth. The onset of COVID-19 has exacerbated the effects of all of these.

As people of faith, we believe that even the worst crisis can become a seedbed of transformation. We hold out hope that New York can leverage this current crisis so that it does not further exacerbate racial and socioeconomic disparities in health and health care in our state. We ask for action to realize this vision in these five areas: (1) Testing; (2) Data; (3) Clinical Trials; (4) Funding for Urgent Care; and (5) Socioeconomic justice. Now is our chance!

### **Testing**

Ramp up testing in communities of color! Ensure that minorities have the same access to testing as the predominant white culture. Testing sites should be accessible to those who don't have cars. Testing sites should be made available along public transportation routes, and there should be mobile access to testing sites within cities and communities. Investigate why African Americans and people of color are less likely to be referred for testing even when (1) they have health care and a primary care physician and (2) are showing signs of infection.

## **Data**

Strengthen measures for keeping track of racial data on COVID 19 victims and broadly release that data.

## **Clinical Trials**

Given that minorities account for roughly 10% of patients and that they have the highest morbidity and mortality rates, ensure that research protocols for clinical trials have enough people of color so there will be no untoward effects on these populations. Call on the medical community to reach out to African Americans and people of color to participate in research for drugs and vaccines.

## **Funding for More Urgent Care and Health Clinics**

So many of our urgent care centers are located in areas where the most vulnerable among us have little to no access. While many urgent care centers are located in our suburbs, fewer (sometimes none) are located in our cities where the highest concentration of people of color live.

## **Socioeconomic Justice**

Begin now: invest in communities hardest hit by COVID 19. This is perhaps the most urgent and effective action New York could take. It would not only redress past underinvestment, but also the ongoing impact of the economic crisis. If there is any good to come of this crisis, let it be a renewed commitment - and the resolve to act on that commitment - to the socially and economically disenfranchised of New York.

We, in the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, stand behind you, commend you for your efforts, and hold you in prayer.

Your fellow servant for the good of all people,



Right Reverend Prince G. Singh, Ph.D.  
VIII Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester

## **Members of Rochester Racial Healing and Justice Action Committee:**

Mr. Floyd Bayley, Member, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Rochester

Reverend Ruth Ferguson, Rector, Christ Church, Rochester

Reverend Andrea Stridiron, Secretary to Convention, Episcopal Diocese of Rochester and Deacon, St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, Rochester