

Dear MCHHS Community,

It is with a heavy heart that I reach out to you, not only as the chair of our college's Diversity and Inclusion council, but as a Black woman faculty member to express my deepest condolences to the families of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, as well as the countless Black and Brown people who are discriminated against and navigating spaces of inequality on a daily basis.

Racism is an ugly, yet endemic part of our society, rearing its ugly head in institutions meant to protect us, serve us, and educate us. I cry as I continually watch people who look like me continue to be killed for just living, for going about their day. I fear for myself and my significant other's life as we navigate our daily lives, fearful that someone might think we look "suspicious" or "fit the description." Further, as we navigate our current pandemic, Black people are dying at nearly double than that of any other race representing nearly 40% of our country's COVID-19 deaths, yet only 13% of our country's population.

With the stress and strain of our current world right now, we are tired. Our country is hurting right now, your students of color are hurting, your faculty are hurting, your staff are hurting. As a university and as a college, we must support our community. We must be proactive in the advocacy for change. We have a responsibility as educators and as leaders to have critical conversations regarding systemic issues that permeate our institutions. We have a responsibility to speak up and push for equality, for representation, and must speak out against injustices within our country. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery are only a snippet of the incidents that occur within our country that shines a spotlight on the racial injustices that our Black community endures daily. As a university and college community, we must be responsible for tackling injustices head on and working to provide a safe and inclusive community for our students, faculty, and staff.

Now is not the time to argue about the existence of racism, of injustice, of the murder of Black and Brown people—its existence is evident. Now is the time to push forward, to not only educate ourselves of systematic injustices and inequalities, but to actively work as a community to dismantle those oppressive structures. Diversity and inclusion is not only about creating spaces and opportunities for marginalized students, it is about creating spaces where their voices, concerns, feelings, and experiences are heard and supported. As we move forward with the memories of people like George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor in our minds, we as a community must continue to educate ourselves on the injustices of marginalized populations, work to create brave spaces of critical dialogue, and push for inclusivity in our curriculums and our classrooms. It is my hope that as we matriculate into coming academic years and beyond, we will create spaces where all these things can happen. The fight for injustice continues with us.

With this letter, I call our administrators, our faculty, and our staff to educate ourselves on these issues. The council will be meeting soon to review options and make concrete suggestions to our college that reach beyond "soft" recommendations. The education and the change continues with us.

Best Regards,

Dr. Ashley N. Payne

Co-Chair, McQueary College of Health and Human Services Diversity and Inclusion Council

The education starts within. Here are a list of resources for self-examination and to build knowledge:

[Click Here](#)