

CALL FOR ACTION AGAINST SYSTEMIC RACISM FROM BYM FRIENDS TO ALL OUR LOCAL MEETINGS

Dear Friends,

This country has been immersed for so long in our struggles with racism: from genocide of indigenous people, slavery, and the Civil War, through generations of Jim Crow's oppressive segregation and the internment of Japanese Americans, and in the [violent inequality too often experienced to this day in law enforcement](#), in mass incarceration, and in the daily lives of our African-American neighbors and other people of color. At this troubled time, BYM Friends as individuals, with our local Meetings and other worshiping communities, are called to act and to help in turning this historic tide of racism both in our wider society and in ourselves.

As fish may not notice the water they swim in, white Americans too long have accepted so much in this environment as unfortunate, random incidents and averted their attention. But, with the advent of cellphone cameras, social media and the internet communication, our country--like the rest of the world-- no longer can claim such ignorance. Our awareness can bring with it a sea change. The [recent murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police](#) is just one of the most recent and most clearly documented atrocities in the name of law enforcement. His case is among [more than 400 reported killings of citizens by U.S. police officers so far this year](#). Unequal patterns of arrest culminate in [incarceration of African Americans at a rate 5.1 times greater than that of white Americans](#), although studies of [drug involvement](#) and [traffic violations](#) suggest the underlying behavior is quite similar.

We also must recognize that de facto law enforcement and criminal justice racism is the tip of the iceberg in our ocean of social and economic injustice. White households in the U.S., on average, [hold ten times more assets than African American households](#). In [health care \(including COVID-19 measures\)](#), [education](#), and [other social and economic opportunities](#), there also are huge disparities that represent the [culmination of generations of government-sanctioned discrimination on local, state and federal levels](#).

Our Quaker values call us to speak truth and to seek equality for all people. Our [BYM Declaration As An Anti-Racist Faith Community](#) calls us to work with impacted people to make a difference with all our decisions and actions. As Friends Meeting of Washington has asked through its sign ministry, "How does your life help end racial injustice?" With this letter, a group of BYM Friends from several states and committees unite to call for all our local Meetings to take action.

As Quakers once served as catalysts and key allies in the struggle to end slavery, please take this opportunity brought by our country's shame at law enforcement's misuse of deadly force against George Floyd and so many other people of color, by the ongoing protests, in the eye of our COVID-19 storm. Let us accept Bayard Rustin's wisdom that "we need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers" and John Lewis's call to "make good trouble."

Here is what we hope Friends will do in every part of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Be practical, but be urgent. As local Meetings, as individuals and as part of BYM, please work with impacted people in each community, together, to:

- 1) Insist on [Town Meetings](#) joining people of color, police chiefs and leaders of local government to discuss prior deadly-force, "broken windows," profiling, and other policies that lead to oppression of African American and other people of color, and to demand changes in our police system to eliminate entirely such harms.
- 2) [Contact our state legislators](#) and governors to demand changes in our policing and criminal justice system.
- 3) [Convene a series of community conversations](#) about impacts of systemic racism—beginning with policing, then moving on to health, education and other economic and social injustices—between white, African American, and other people of color, between business owners, government leaders, workers and unemployed people, between faith leaders, students, and parents.

4) Identify local groups and national organizations led by people of color and those already involved in anti-racist organizing, such as the [NAACP](#), [Movement for Black Lives](#) and [BYP100](#), to find and implement other specific ways our local Meetings may support and engage meaningfully with those efforts. While the recent cases of state-sanctioned violence and extrajudicial killing have sparked renewed urgency among white Friends, local and Yearly Meetings as predominantly white institutions should not ignore anti-racist work already in progress and often led by people of color.

5) Hold ourselves accountable. Please share your plans! Friends and others are looking for models to follow. Each individual, Meeting and committee responding to this Call is invited to report by emailing to [Nikki Richards](#) what you / we are doing for possible inclusion on a [new BYM webpage of Friends Commitments and Resources for Racial Justice in Action](#).

Anne Frank wrote, *“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”* Let us wait no longer. George Fox wrote of seeing *“a great people to be gathered”*: So, it still is today, both despite and because of our diversity.

BYM Friends, from various local Meetings and committees, who unite in support of this Call for action against systemic racism in our country include:

Lauren Brownlee
Bethesda Meeting

Phil Caroom
Annapolis Meeting

Ellen Cronin
Sandy Spring Meeting

David Etheridge
Friends Meeting of Washington

Donna Hamilton
Sandy Spring Meeting

Khalila Lomax
BYM STRIDE coordinator

Sam McCormick
Philadelphia STRIDE volunteer

Peirce Hammond
Bethesda Meeting

Mackenzie Morgan
Adelphi Meeting

Clinton Pettus
Baltimore (Stony Run) Meeting

Bob Rhudy
Patapsco Meeting

Nikki Richards
Reparations Action Working Group

Marcy Seitel
Adelphi Meeting

Ken Stockbridge
Patapsco Meeting

Ann Worley
Sandy Spring Meeting

BYM Growing Diverse Leadership Committee

BYM Peace and Social Concerns Committee

BYM Reparations Action Working Group

BYM STRIDE working group

BYM Working Group on Racism