



City of Houston



July 27, 2020

Dear Fellow Houstonians,

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, more than 14,632,087 cases and more than 608,572 deaths have been confirmed worldwide as of July 20, 2020, according to the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center, and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 3,761,362 cases and 140,157 deaths have been reported in the United States as of this same date.

Unimpeded by political boundaries, COVID-19 has infected people from all racial, national and ethnic backgrounds. It was not created or caused by any race, nationality or ethnicity and the World Health Organization has cautioned against using geographic descriptors that can fuel ethnic and racial discrimination.

Data demonstrates COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, including communities of color. According to CDC reporting, Black patients make up approximately 33 percent of those hospitalized with COVID-19 despite comprising only thirteen percent of the U.S. population. Additionally, per this same reporting, Black and Hispanic patients represent nearly two-thirds of coronavirus deaths among those younger than 65. These gross disparities in the COVID-19 infection and death rate arise are not new but instead arise from systems and structures of racist oppression that have persisted in the U.S. throughout our history.

As the City of Houston confronts the COVID-19 pandemic, we are fully committed to the safety, security, and equal treatment of all residents. We also understand that each person has the ability to promote inclusiveness, celebrate diversity, support their fellow community members, prevent the spread of misinformation, and reject hate and bias in all forms.

Unfortunately, hate crimes, discrimination and aggression against Asian and Pacific Islander individuals and Jewish people are on the rise throughout the country as these groups are being blamed for the COVID-19 outbreak and spread. As our history has shown, times of great fear, uncertainty and unrest can lead to the demonization, blaming, and scapegoating of groups as the “other.” Extremists are taking advantage of COVID-19 to spread their hateful ideologies, including anti-Semitism, racism, Islamophobia, and Sinophobia, contributing to the surge in reporting of bias-motivated incidents targeting members of the Asian and Pacific Islander community in the U.S.

COVID-19 is a public health issue, not a racial, religious or ethnic one, and the deliberate use of terms such as “Chinese virus” or “Kung Fu or Flu virus” to describe it only encourages hate crimes and incidents against Asian and Pacific Islander individuals and further spreads misinformation at a time when communities should be working together to confront the crisis.



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The Jewish community has also been targeted with blame, hate, anti-Semitic tropes and conspiracy theories about their creating, spreading and profiting from COVID-19. Stigmatizing specific communities for the COVID-19 outbreak and world-wide spread creates an inexcusable risk to all community members. Thus, the City of Houston must take leadership and stand in solidarity with its Asian and Pacific Islander and Jewish communities to send a message that discriminatory and hate-motivated behavior or violence will not be tolerated.

The City of Houston must also take leadership and stand in solidarity with communities to address and dismantle the racist and inequitable systems that give rise to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities.

Therefore, the undersigned, on behalf of the City of Houston and the City of Houston's City Council:

- 1) Denounce anti-Semitism, anti-Asian bigotry, racism and all hateful speech, violent action and the spread of misinformation related to COVID-19 that casts blame, promotes racism or discrimination or harms the City of Houston Asian Pacific, Black, Latinx, Jewish, immigrant or other ethnic and religious communities.
- 2) Join with the governments of cities, counties and states across the country in affirming their commitment to the safety and well-being of all community members, including the Asian and Pacific Islander and Jewish communities, and in combating hate crimes targeting Asian and Pacific Islander individuals and Jewish people.
- 3) Will continue our efforts to protect residents and targets and victims of hate, and to investigate, prosecute and curb hate acts related to COVID-19 in partnership with nonprofit organizations, the Harris County District Attorney's Office, the Harris County Sheriff's Department and other law enforcement partners.
- 4) Commit to addressing inequities amplified and perpetuated by COVID-19, including by collecting and reporting demographic data of individuals who have contracted, recovered from and died from COVID-19.
- 5) Commit to ensuring access to resources for all community members as well as equal rights and dignity.
- 6) Vow to investigate ways to address the role of racist and systemic inequality in employment, education and healthcare within its jurisdiction.



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- 7) Urge residents to join us in calling attention to these harms and denounce hate. We also encourage residents to report anti-Semitic, discriminatory or racist incidents to the proper authorities, including by filing reports by accessing [ADL Report Hate Incidents](#).
- 8) Pledge to support the inalienable rights of all people in our community, who should be treated with respect and must remain safe during this pandemic. We call upon all our residents to treat each other with respect.
- 9) Urge residents to join us in calling attention to these harms and denouncing hate to help keep us all safe during this unprecedented pandemic and beyond.

Finally, the undersigned confirm our commitment to help keep all Houstonians safe during this unprecedented pandemic and beyond.

Handwritten signature of Sylvester Turner in black ink.

Sylvester Turner
Mayor, City of Houston

Handwritten signature of Abbie Kamin in black ink.

Abbie Kamin
Houston City Council, District C
Chair, Public Safety & Homeland Security

Handwritten signature of Amy Peck in black ink.

Amy Peck
Houston City Council, District A

Handwritten signature of Robert Gallegos in black ink.

Robert Gallegos
Houston City Council, District I
Chair, Quality of Life

Handwritten signature of Carolyn Evans-Shabazz in black ink.

Carolyn Evans-Shabazz
Houston City Council, District D
Vice Chair, Childhood & Youth

Handwritten signature of Edward Pollard in black ink.

Edward Pollard
Houston City Council, District J
Vice Chair, Budget Fiscal Affairs

Handwritten signature of Karla Cisneros in black ink.

Karla Cisneros
Houston City Council, District H
Chair, Childhood & Youth

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Chair, Transportation, Technology, &
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Chair, Regulatory & Neighborhood Affairs