

The events of the past weeks have once again illuminated the harsh and evil realities of American life. It was not the first time in 400 years that non-white people were systematically murdered in full view of white observers, or lost their lives under the purview of white controlled publically sanctioned institutions. However, hundreds of thousands of people all over the world have recently acknowledged that these circumstances are, and always have been, a large part of the fabric of American society. They have also recognized that the reason this condition has lasted so long is the systemic white privilege that has existed since the foundation of the republic. That this understanding has expanded into mainstream consciousness means that now, maybe, America will fix it.

Those of us at the WPBHA witnessed the recent heartbreaking events with horror, but not shock. We see the effects of our nation's inequalities every day in the lives of our residents and program participants: poverty, violence, emotional struggles and debilitating depression. We also see amazing bravery, resilience, faith, good will and an incredible determination not to be defined by the false perceptions imposed by society. We see people that are tired, but not hopeless.

The WPBHA has been an institution in this community since 1938. We acknowledge past mistakes through 82 years of government programming, but today we are committed to our mission of creating an environment where the people we serve can thrive and ultimately succeed. Part of this mission is to be fearless in the pursuit of equality. We must combat the systematic injustice in education, health care, banking, employment and the criminal justice system as well as the housing discrimination that too often limits access to opportunities for a safe and secure future. Adopting policies that memorialize the mission is important, but does not guarantee implementation in any practical sense (See: U.S. Constitution.) As President Obama recently said, "We have to WORK to make things better."

The WPBHA will take steps to ensure that our own house is in order. We will evaluate all our operations to determine if they are carried out in accordance with our avowed principals. We will review explicit and implicit bias on the part of staff and others, the effects of internal budgetary decisions, and our interactions with outside agencies and the public. We will also review how embedded national and local racist policies affect our communities and our ability to ensure fair and equitable treatment. We will look for and invite both public and private partners to participate in tangible, effective projects. We will seek change where we must, and recommit, every day, to freedom and justice for all.

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