



Statement on Police Violence and the Murder of George Floyd

My heart is heavy with the weight of generational economic and social injustice. We are tired. Peaceful protesting is our human right and gives voice to the voiceless, so we remain steadfast.

- Brenda Palms Barber

As the President and CEO of the North Lawndale Employment Network, it is deeply troubling and disheartening to witness the continual injustices brought against people of color as we have worked for 20 years to dismantle systems of racism and oppression through workforce development. We believe in our mission, vision and the people of North Lawndale. We understand the heartache and outrage. We see you. We hear you. We are with you.

However, the destruction of our communities also weighs heavy on our hearts. This week, I sat in on a call hosted by Mayor Lori Lightfoot in response to the ongoing unrest in protest of police violence against unarmed people of color. While we all can understand the pain, hurt, anger and frustration with centuries of violence and racism against people of color, we all agreed that tearing down our communities is not the path to freedom and equality.

At the conclusion, of the meeting Mayor Lightfoot asked that we *pray for us*, and the new police superintendent asked that we *partner with the city - now's the time*.

Now is the time to come together on one accord to plan and take effective action.

Yesterday, a special meeting took place with each operating site of the READI Chicago program in partnership with Heartland Alliance. It was a moment to stop and listen to our READI participants and hear them share their views on the George Floyd murder and protesting. They were all in favor of the protesting, but frustrated to see businesses in their neighborhood destroyed. I am working with Heartland Alliance, our Alderman Michael Scott Jr. of the 24th Ward, our employees and our local media to lift up the voices of our READI participants and share their honest and surprising thoughts and recommendations on steps we can take to ease tensions in op-eds for the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times and Block Club Chicago.

I am grateful to you as key stakeholders in advancing and supporting NLEN and Sweet Beginnings. In spite of my frustrations, I remain hopeful and determined that together we will overcome racism and systems of oppression.

What I know for sure is, *this too, will pass*. And, we will be better, in time.

Stay safe. Be healthy. Bee well.

Brenda Palms Barber

President & CEO of the North Lawndale Employment Network