TO: College of Education and Social Services Community

FR: Scott L. Thomas, Dean and Professor
    Tiffanie Spencer, Director for Diversity and Community Engagement
    Lynn C. White Cloud, Assistant Dean for Academic and Student Affairs

RE: Solidarity Against Racism, Police Abuse, and Injustice

Our work in the College of Education and Social Services strives to promote a more humane and just society, free from oppression, that maximizes human potential and the quality of life for all individuals, families, and communities. Our asset-based approach to the essential problems we engage in the College and in the communities where we serve often leads us to speak more about what we do and believe. However, to be equally self-aware and accountable, we must also clearly and consistently break silences and speak up for what we do not tolerate. That is who we are.

Our College joins in solidarity for change and peace with the recent call to action from UVM Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Wanda Heading-Grant to redouble our efforts and insist on systemic reform:

"Despite the challenges we face and the fear we may feel, let us redouble our efforts and insist on systemic reform. I know we cannot take on everything, but we can have an impact at UVM, and in the communities where we serve that will branch out to advance critical social and cultural efforts everywhere. We must use our educational platform to share and enhance knowledge, understanding, ideas and solutions that not only address issues of prejudice and discrimination, but also transform lives for generations to come. We must endeavor to inspire professionals who will be more just, equitable, compassionate, and anti-racist." (UVM Web, 06-03-20)

In this moment of national turmoil, triggered by the murder of George Floyd, we want to name three things that we must stand squarely against as a community: Racism, police brutality, and systemic racial injustice. Each of these is antithetical to the values of our College and the mission we exist to serve. Let us be clear:

**We stand against racism.** We in the College of Education and Social Services unequivocally condemn racism in all its forms. We hear the call clearly that Black Lives Matter and we wholeheartedly agree. We stand as a College in solidarity for humanity, equity, and justice.

**We stand against police brutality and civil rights violations.** The systematic violence inflicted upon our communities of color is devastating and unacceptable. We join all who grieve George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and the countless other Black Americans and people of color who have had their civil rights violated or have been injured or died at the hand of those we grant the authority and power to serve and protect all of us. We stand as a College for vibrant, just, healthy, and safe communities for all, and for reforms to law enforcement and criminal justice systems where obstacles to justice stubbornly persist.

**We stand against systemic racial injustice in the United States.** Historic and systemic racism persists in organizations, policies, land use, housing, health care, employment, education, and criminal justice. It infects the very principles, priorities, and structure of our society and makes a mockery of the social contract on which our democracy rests. We stand for racial justice and systemic changes that realize equity.

We express our solidarity with those protesting the durable injustices and silences, the violence, and the anger and fear that so many people of color in America live with every day. These ongoing tragedies in the
U.S., building on a long history of racial prejudice and injustice, are heartbreaking, unfair, and demand our individual and collective actions.

Whether you choose to engage in civil disobedience, speaking truth to power, and/or focusing your learning, research, teaching, or service on addressing these inequities and the violence, we urge you to self-reflect, learn more, connect, and act. Saying Black Lives Matter is not enough.

- As lifelong learners, we should engage in self-review and seek new knowledge.
- As educators, we should act on our courses and curriculum to ensure they do not contribute to the systematic racism that fuels racial prejudice and injustice.
- As researchers, we should use our skills and training to more equitably frame these durable problems and work toward inclusive solutions.
- As students, we should work to make this country better and equitable. We look forward to continuing to listen to what is important to you in how oppression and racial injustice shows up in your lives and how it integrates with both the content and practice of working with individuals, families, and communities.
- As community members, we should listen to the voices of Black and marginalized voices, and we should be working to educate, support, and hold our local government, schools, and the police accountable.

The CESS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan offers concrete commitments and action steps related to our teaching, research, and service. Our CESS Committee on Equity, Action, and Diversity, our CESS Student Advisory Board and each of our organizational units will continue its important work and programming in the coming year. Our work remains imperfect and iterative. We commit to continuing to work collaboratively and diligently to make it better and more impactful.

We close by reaffirming our role in the College of Education and Social Services to create a more humane and just society. As a College, we will continue to focus on the complex and nuanced issues driving institutionalized racism in our communities.

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The University of Vermont operates on the Abenaki people’s unceded traditional territory.