I know that I am not alone in finding myself deeply saddened by the senseless and unjust deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery - individuals who lost their lives within the past 30 days. They look like me, my husband, and my children.

Their deaths have reminded us that coronavirus is hardly the only disease we need to fight and prevent. Nor is it the only disease for which we may be asymptomatic. Their deaths shined the light on the malignant economic, social, and racial issues that divide our communities.

Our United Way is saddened and outraged by the racial violence and injustice in our country. We are also asking ourselves how we can make a difference during this difficult time. If we are committed to building a healthier, thriving, and more compassionate community, then we must channel our justifiable outrage to collaborative action.

We Must Stand United For Justice.

Everyone deserves the right to live in a society where they feel safe, respected, and protected. We can and must do better to guarantee that the rights and freedom of every person in every community are ensured and protected. In the end, we all have a role to play in creating a more equitable future.
Our greatest strength at United Way of Santa Cruz County is our ability to work collaboratively with the entire community. We have always partnered with various allies - from local elected leaders to those with lived experiences, business, school leaders, school districts, parents, families, volunteers, and donors - to tackle complex challenges like poverty and inequity.

The word "United" in our name means something. How we "Live United" matters. We can disagree on many things, but we must all agree that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. We are better as a nation when we come together to confront our crises, rather than let those crises divide us.

I want you to know where we stand. United Way of Santa Cruz County is against hate. We oppose bigotry in all its forms. We are against violence. We are for peaceful, constructive dialogue and action. We aim to achieve sustainable change that will move families from crisis to thriving and to create a healthy and safe Santa Cruz County for all.

**What Will United Way Do?**

This is not a short-term commitment. This is not lip service. We have to continue even when the hurt once again dulls. We do not know 100% what things will look like moving forward, but we do know it might make some people uncomfortable. That is okay with us. We believe that it is important we all get comfortable with being a little uncomfortable in an effort to transcend the "-isms" in everyday life.

All of our children, including my children, are watching to see how we respond in this moment, and they are counting on us to build a just and equitable community for everyone. They deserve a future where every family has the financial security it needs to remain housed and fed. They deserve a future where every child can walk in our community, unafraid of unforeseen and undeserved tragedy.

Our United Way offers our highly respected convening for the healing and systems change work that must be done. Together, our ideas for change can move us into the recovery and resilient stages of this pandemic, and dismantle systems that have been barriers to accessing justice for us. Join us to stand for justice and equity.

Now more than ever, we must LIVE UNITED.

Keisha Browder
CEO - United Way of Santa Cruz County

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