

BAI Statement: Fighting for Black Lives

George Floyd. Tony McDade. Nina Pop. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery...and countless others who will never see tomorrow because of the systems of oppression rooted in anti-Blackness that are entrenched in every facet of life. And it is these same interwoven systems that have made our communities not only disproportionately vulnerable to COVID-19 but to HIV/AIDS as well.

In the past few weeks, with millions taking to the streets, it's clear that we have come to a frustrating and heartbreaking tipping point. While something may feel new and different about this time, it is not just another week in America—this is *every week* in America. And like many of you, the staff, board, and leader-activists of the Black AIDS Institute family are angered, frustrated, saddened and absolutely tired.

We see you. We hear you. We stand in grief, pain, and anger with you.

But we have resolve, one that is rooted in more than 400 years of surviving, growing, mobilizing, and fighting to gain freedom. As Black people our existence and gifts to this world are vital, and Black people persist, innovate, and endure. We have dreamed the dream and we have seen the promise of a future where Black people are not only present, but *all* Black people are *thriving*.

That's the vision BAI's founders had in mind when they stood boldly in the audacious goal to end the HIV epidemic among Black people. More than 21 years later that vision continues to inspire, inform, and ignite every part of our mission and work. What we've learned in the past two decades is that HIV is only one of the many ways that anti-Blackness, homophobia, and transphobia have evolved to continue to maintain a chokehold on our freedom. Longstanding practices such as redlining, police brutality, discriminatory gender laws, and other forms of white supremacy are risk factors for HIV. Yet the solutions many other organizations and our government have invested in to end HIV only respond to the outcomes, and we demand a change that responds to the wholeness of Black people by responding to the drivers of oppression and its surface-level manifestations such as HIV.

As BAI's *We the People: A Black Plan to End HIV* lays out in its four pillars of solutions, sustainable change requires thinking outside of the myopic, single-issue silos that do not acknowledge the centuries of oppression and covert systems that white supremacy has created.

We cannot achieve freedom for Black people without systemic, structural change *now*.

While organizations and leaders may now be publicly calling for “an end to hate and racial injustices” or issuing statements in solidarity with #BlackLivesMatter, when we look at their boards, their leadership teams, and their investments in ending systemic racism, **we see nothing**. Sadly, this mirrors the HIV movement, where the majority of its organizations are led by white people—with mostly white boards—that don't reflect the communities they serve. Even worse: they refuse to make meaningful investments in the structural drivers of why HIV disproportionately impacts Black people. We demand more.

We deserve to be safe. Governments and political leaders, from the local level to the federal, must rethink and reimagine their approach to law enforcement and must re-envision it as an intervention rooted in restorative justice and non-violence. Policing and other iterations of traditional law enforcement must be defunded & abolished, and those resources must be invested directly into our communities, which have been grossly impacted for so long by anti-Black policing.

We deserve to be healthy. Black people disproportionately suffer from a range of chronic illnesses such as HIV, diabetes, and heart disease and have higher mortality rates. In addition to expanding and adding funding to Medicaid, governments must ensure that Black people have access to quality, affordable physical and mental healthcare that is responsive to our needs and is affirming. Also, we deserve to have access to healthy, nutritious food instead of being relegated to food deserts.

We deserve places to live. The Black homeownership rate is the lowest it has been in over 50 years. The disparity between Black people and whites inability to afford housing and experiencing housing instability has never been greater. Governments and political leaders must end this ensuring that everyone has access to affordable and safe housing.

We deserve jobs. Black unemployment has historically been twice the rate of the unemployment rate of the country as a whole—and, once employed, far too often the only option for Black people is menial, minimum-wage jobs. Government, business and political leaders must ensure that Black people have access to good-paying jobs with meaningful representation at all levels of leadership. This must change.

We deserve to heal. Governments, political leaders, and communities must confront its history of centuries of trauma stemming from slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, police brutality and the myriad other forms of anti-Blackness that have been present since the first enslaved people arrived on this country's shores. As part of this, they must make Black people whole—mentally and materially—from this history of trauma.

These demands are not new, or unique. They have been made before, and they are being made by many others again, as the Movement for Black Lives did with their [call to action and demands](#) issued last week. Yet, perhaps now, finally, our justifiable rage will usher in this change. Thankfully, we've already seen the beginnings with the arrests of George Floyd's murderers. We've seen individuals, institutions and companies invest in organizations such as BAI to show their commitment to empowering Black people and helping eradicate systemic oppression so that Black people can live long, healthy lives.

For that, we say **thank you, but** don't let up—we have so much more work to do. Most importantly, never lose sight that while we understand that our lives have immense value, we also live in a country that values, affirms, understands, and equitably prioritizes the reality that ALL Black Lives Matter. That is our mission today, tomorrow, and forever.

Black Lives Matter.

Black Poz Lives Matter.

Black LGBTQ Lives Matter.

Black Trans Lives Matter.

BLACK LIVES MATTER.