



**SMITH CENTER
FOR HEALING AND THE ARTS**

community. creativity. cancer support.

Dear Smith Center Family and wider community,

It is with a heavy heart and weary spirit that I reach out to you today to voice Smith Center for Healing and the Arts' outrage and sadness around current events.

Over the past few weeks, we've had an influx of painful information and images from the impact of Covid-19 on communities of color and the senseless deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Sadly, these are not isolated incidents but only the most recent examples that bring to light the relentless and devastating impact of institutional and systemic racism across the country.

Smith Center for Healing and the Arts, an organization devoted to helping people dealing with cancer and chronic illness, condemns these actions and we add our voices to those across the country saying enough is enough. I can't think of a better community of people than ours – a community focused on love and support, living through difficulty and adversity, and using art, music, and so many other wonderful tools for healing and peace to help at this time.

I wrestled with saying anything about my personal experiences which seem so trivial when others have lost their lives but it's the daily brushes with racism that tear away at the soul – I'm that little girl that heard repeatedly that I had to work twice as hard at everything because of the color of my skin, I am that worried wife when my husband is out at night and I hold my breath until the garage door opens, and I am that shopper who's been followed around stores but never asked if I need help. This is just how it is when you are African American and that, along with the senseless loss of any more lives, must end.

I am so proud to be the Executive Director at Smith Center and work with an amazing team of people. We are committed to being part of the solution and not part of the problem. We don't have all the answers, but we are here and we stand at the ready to be a community partner and ally to help bring change in DC.

I leave you with the words of one of my favorite songs written by the legendary Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, and sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock. The song is Ella's Song, dedicated to one of my heroes - Ella Baker.

"We who believe in freedom cannot rest. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."

Take gentle care and let's get to work,



Lisa Simms Booth
Executive Director