



Karol V. Mason  
President  
212.237.8600  
president@jjay.cuny.edu

April 23, 2020

TO: The John Jay College Community

RE: Feeling the Impact of Covid-19

New York City is at the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic, and our community is feeling the full impact of this health crisis. It's weighing on our minds and it's affecting our families, friends, and neighbors. As an African-American woman, and President of a Hispanic- and Minority-Serving Institution, seeing the overwhelming evidence that this virus disproportionately impacts communities of color cuts me to the bone. At John Jay it's our mission to explore issues of justice across its many dimensions. Honoring the intent of that mission, there can be no doubt, this epidemic has revealed glaring, deeply entrenched inequities throughout our country.

Every day vital members of our John Jay family are tirelessly working on the front lines to ensure the safety of our communities. To all of our first responders and essential workers, we're proud of your incredible commitment and we're grateful for your unfailing service and personal sacrifice. Thank you for keeping our communities going.

All of us know someone who has either been infected by Covid-19, or, more painfully, lost a loved one to the disease. It's frightening, traumatic, and emotionally draining trying to process what's going on around us. We recognize the distress that this crisis has created, and we appreciate the need to grieve before real healing can begin.

As we watch the pandemic unfold before our eyes, the disparate impact in the rate of contraction and the rate of death amongst different communities has become clearer. The New York City Health Department has reported that Latinx people, who make up about 29 percent of the City's population, represent 34 percent of the patients who have died from Covid-19, and 28 percent of the reported Covid-19 deaths were among Black people, who represent 24 percent of the population. The disparities become even more staggering when we broaden the perspective to a national level. Across the nation Black people are dying of Covid-19 at a rate of more than twice their population share. Collectively, Black people represent 11 percent of the population in states releasing data, but they have suffered 28 percent of the deaths. This disease does not discriminate—it can infect anyone, from any race, ethnicity, or social class—but there is a steeper price that Black, Latinx, Native American, low-income, and undocumented people are paying because of structural inequities embedded in our society.

As a Hispanic-Serving Institution and a Minority-Serving Institution that prides itself on promoting social mobility, we have to ask ourselves: Why are Black and Latinx people bearing the heaviest burden from this epidemic? The toll of this disease is putting long-standing inequities from every dimension of

our lives into sharp focus—be it economic inequities, housing inequities, environmental inequities, or resource inequities.

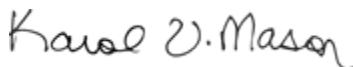
Communities of color represent the largest portion of our country's essential workforce. They're driving our ambulances, patrolling our streets, stocking our groceries, delivering our packages, working in our factories, driving our trains and buses, and riding crowded public transportation to get to these essential jobs, all while facing increased exposure to this deadly disease. Predominately Black and brown neighborhoods are subjected to significantly more environmental pollutants than other neighborhoods, which can lead to chronic health conditions that make them more vulnerable to the devastating outcomes of Covid-19. And, as a legacy of redlining, many Black and Latinx families live in densely populated neighborhoods with fewer healthy food options and less open spaces, contributing to higher rates of obesity, another risk factor for complications from the disease. When we scratch the surface of these statistics, we're destined to find deep-rooted inequalities.

Scientists suggest that pandemics like this one come around once every 100 years. But in addition to the tragic human toll, a global health crisis like Covid-19 also shines a glaring light on unjust policies and practices that have been with us for centuries. Social justice disparities that members of our College regularly research, study, and fight become highly visible. When people don't have access to healthcare services, healthy food sources, affordable housing, job flexibility and sick leave, it's unfair, and yet entirely foreseeable, that their suffering becomes disproportionate to the community at large.

We're currently in the thick of this global health crisis, but it's my sincerest hope that when we come out on the other side, we'll start to make significant changes in the way we live our lives and structure our societies. For the sake of our College community, our state, and our country, we have to work together and seize the opportunity to create a more just world.

Please continue to take care of yourselves both physically and emotionally, and reach out to others when you need help. Remember that [John Jay](#) and [our City and State](#) have resources to support you. It's our care and commitment to each other that will see us through these challenging times.

With gratitude,



Karol V. Mason  
President