



June 2, 2020

Dear Community,

As a Black-serving organization with a deep belief that your race should not determine your survival, EBCLC is outraged. There is a trifecta of crisis upon us and Black folks are disproportionately bearing the burden. We are outraged by the purposeful failure of our government to invest in the health of Black communities and the disproportionate death and devastation they experience from COVID-19. We are outraged at the staggering economic insecurity and joblessness that Black people, many of whom are still struggling to recover from the last recession, struggling to recover from historic pilfering, face as the pandemic takes the economy into free-fall. We are outraged by the impunity of state-sponsored violence, by the loss of Black life at the hands of police officers. We absolutely affirm the courage of activists and protesters in the East Bay and around the country who are demanding justice for George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor and asserting their own right to live. We also want to specifically name and lift up Tony McDade, a Black Trans man killed by Tallahassee Police. We are in solidarity with the movement organizers who have asserted that his life mattered, too. And we want to recognize that today – June 2, 2020 – is the one-year anniversary of the police killing of Miles Hall, a 23 year-old Black man in Walnut Creek, California.

EBCLC is a systems-change organization. Every day our staff labors for bold change and must negotiate incremental progress. In this moment, we are asking ourselves what we must do to make systems change nonnegotiable. Providing direct legal services, by its very nature, is an act of triaging. Our staff work within existing structures to remedy the devastation that systemic injustice has wrought. We bring relief to people by helping them to comply with the demands of landlords, debt collectors, public benefits agencies, school districts, Immigrations Customs and Enforcement (ICE), traffic courts, and the police. The demands of a justice system that maintains white supremacy. At the same time, we work to abolish these very same institutions, each day fighting back against the pervasive notion that reform will lead to liberation. Today, we are imagining radical shifts and reflecting on what we must risk to implement them. How can we continue to triage and help our clients pay their rent, pay criminal fines and fees, and pay their asylum and DACA application fees while demanding that these dollars go to people, not the coffers of entities engaged in oppression? How should our work be reframed to unequivocally support universal basic income, student loan debt cancellation, universal healthcare, and ICE abolition? How does EBCLC support the work that each member of our Board, staff, and student body have to do to stop the police killing of Black people? Our commitment to systems change demands that the answers to these questions be palpable in all of our work.

EBCLC is ready to meet this moment. Our success has always relied on the lived experiences of our staff and our connection to the communities we serve. We are immigrants, descendants of the civil rights movement, survivors, renters, student debt holders, family navigators who spent their childhoods “case managing” their monolingual parents’ citizenship status and work permits, and members of networks of impoverishment. We are caregivers supporting elderly, disabled, and unemployed household members on one income, and people who have been adversely impacted by various systems including child welfare, criminal justice, and the education systems. We are accountable to the organizers leading our movements for change, the community members who rely on our services for their very survival, to each other. We are grieving. We are angry. And we are resilient.