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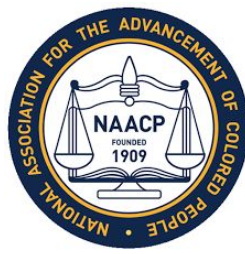
An Open Letter to Vermont's People of Color:

Hello family. These are some scary times and we are sure you are all doing what you can to make it through. To our Asian family, we want to extend a particularly warm and empathetic greeting. We are painfully aware of the rise in anti-Asian racism both in Vermont and around the nation. We want you to know that we see you, we see what is happening and we will do what we can to amplify your voices, experiences, and expertise in how to address the hate. We love you and will protect you as we can. On the topic of protection, we would like to encourage all of our brethren, but especially our more melanated family to take one particular action when you interact with medical professionals.

***Disclose your race to the medical professionals you encounter in the process of seeking help.***

We know. It may go against what we may have done to protect ourselves in the past, but those were healthier times. We know that our collective experiences with Western medicine in the United States is and always has been fraught with structural racism and terror. From the Tuskegee experiments to Henrietta Lacks, and even now with the national and international focus on and suggestion to test COVID 19 treatment on African people and in majority-Black and brown cities in the U.S., we cannot escape the ugly truth about racism in our medical system.

We knew before this pandemic that our symptoms are less likely to be taken seriously, we are less likely to receive adequate relief, and healthcare in the areas where we tend to live is often lacking or subpar. We understand all of those things. We also understand that emerging data in states where they are collecting information about race and COVID 19—everything from who is tested to who gets infected, to who dies and who recovers—indicates that we are getting infected more often, we are dying from it faster and we are dying more often than white people. Black and Hispanic folks are the two races of people with the most disparate outcomes, and the sharp rise in anti-Asian hate has threatened the lives of people in the U.S. as well. We are all at risk, but people of color, per the norms of White Supremacy, are at greater risk for more reasons. Yet here in Vermont, our Department of Health has not been collecting data related to race and COVID 19. While many racial justice groups are working with the Governor's office, the Department of Health, and the legislature to change this, so too must we work to advocate for and protect ourselves.



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We already know about social distancing and handwashing, but we must be actively engaged and provide data proactively in order to get a better sense of what is happening to people of color in

Vermont. Data drives decision making. It drives funding. It drives knowledge and dispels myths. It lets us know if interventions and treatment plans are working. Likewise, we recognize that we are not one-dimensional beings. Revealing other aspects of our identities may also shed light on how marginalization is showing up and playing a role both in how we experience COVID 19 and how the system responds to us.

So, we write to you today to ask you to stretch beyond what may be your comfort zone. Yes, medical professionals should be asking you about your race/races. But we also know that sometimes they don't for a variety of reasons. Let's make it easier for them and give ourselves a leg up. If you seek medical support because you suspect you may have COVID 19, tell your medical professional your race when you complete all of the other demographic information. Ask them to document it in your chart if they don't look like they plan to. Explain to them why it is important.

If we all work on this together—medical providers, justice advocates and the general public, we have a chance to gather data that can be used to help us. It's kind of like completing the 2020 Census (which, if you haven't yet, do it here: <https://my2020census.gov/>).

And white people (because I know you're reading this, too), please do the same. You disclosing your race also helps de-normalize white as default. This makes us all more conscious about the ways whiteness is held as the standard rather than one of many.

Thank you, fam. Sending you love and health.

With gratitude and hope,

Tabitha Moore & Steffen Gillom  
Presidents of the Vermont Branches of the NAACP