

We are grateful you made space in your schedules to join us today for what we believe will be a watershed moment, not only for each of us, but also for the children, youth, families, communities and congregations we serve and support.

Today, we all have a responsibility to lean in and be willing to have our current operating paradigms dismantled, disrupted or disentangled. For far too long, our children, families and communities have suffered at the hands of those who say they are helping, when that help never comes in the form of a question (asking)—but rather, *telling!*

We must be bold and courageous in this moment to call out what we have known for a long time: Gender, race, class, sexuality and other U.S. systems operate through what *Black Feminist Thought* author Dr. Patricia Hill Collins calls a “matrix of domination,” which has four central domains:

- Structural—laws, legal systems and regulations set up by the dominant group for the maintenance of power and privilege;
- Disciplinary—law and order, oppressive power relations and surveillance;
- Hegemonic—knowledge and narrative are controlled by those in power; oppressive systems are internalized and can be seen as “common sense;”
- Interpersonal—oppressive behaviors become routine and are normalized (i.e., child welfare removal of Black children) (Collins, 2009).

In recent months, we have been inundated with nice statements, conversations and gifts to Black charities. However, what we have not seen is systems coming together to discuss how they will be intentional in dismantling systemic, institutional and structural racism through which this country was stolen, built and maintained. In her book *White Fragility*, Robin DeAngelo talks about



“aversive racism,” which is what “well-intentioned people who see themselves as educated and progressive” are more likely to exhibit. “They say, my adopted son is Black!” We have to call out racism when we see it and cannot be afraid to do so. Furthermore, we cannot be silent. Silence means being complicit, and that is even more damaging and dangerous.



In child welfare, there have been continuous conversations about “making a difference,” “having an impact” and “doing what is right.” Do we mean what we say or say what we mean? What actually is the difference? How do we know it makes an impact? Who did we ask to see if it was “right”?

You have come today to make a difference, have an impact and do what we know is morally right. To do this means leaning in, not just to the overt racism that makes for breaking news, but also the insidious racism that continues to break away our children from their families and communities.

Many times, we want to make a difference, have an impact and do what is right, but don’t know where or how to start. Today, I will be transparent and realistic. I expect the unexpected in our honest conversations.

I thank you for doing the same. And I thank you for being here.

Sincerely,

