

True Equality and Equity leads to Opportunity for All

**Eric Holcomb
Governor of Indiana**

My fellow Hoosiers,

For most of this year, we have been consumed by COVID-19 and its immense impact on our health and our economy. That's true for all of us as individuals, and it's certainly true for our state and local governments. And, it continues to be the "New Normal" that we manage our way through every day.

Even as we follow the science and work relentlessly to stamp it out, this is clearly one of the most dangerous viruses in our lifetimes. I know this is hard. I know there is fatigue. I know people just want it to go away. I do too.

It has required tremendous sacrifice, we've endured unimaginable loss, and I appreciate everyone's patience, resilience and generosity through it all. Truly, like never before, we're in this together. And that's why, ultimately, we will prevail – together.

That said, we're also facing another kind of virus that's equally voracious, and it's in turn forcing us to a reckoning as a state and nation – one that's built on "equality for all." I'm talking about cases of racism – sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle – that have led to inequity and exclusion, that have plagued our country throughout our storied history.

We now stand at an inflection point, and we have an opportunity to acknowledge those past wrongs, learn from our history and admit where we've come up short of our ideals. Then, we must get about doing what we've done whenever we face a challenge: Make historic progress together. It falls upon us – all of us – no matter how difficult the issue, how far away it may seem, or easy to ignore. We the people, together, marching toward the right will determine our progress.

Our country is unique in that we were founded on the promise that all men were created equal – as our Founders wrote: "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights" ... among them "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

And yet, it's just a fact, the concept wasn't put into practice even before the ink was dry. Quite the contrary. Laws were established that classified African Americans as "property" and prevented women from voting. There's nothing equal about that.

That's why some hundred years later, our nation fought a Civil War – American

against American – to determine if one state could decide whether it was legal to “own” another person. More than 24,000 Hoosiers died and nearly 50,000 were wounded in the fight to prevent slavery from spreading like a virus into states and to preserve a “United” States.

Thankfully, the Union perspective – our side, our state, our Founding “written” principles prevailed – but that hardly leveled the playing field, even here, for years to come.

Over the ensuing decades, anti-slavery states like Indiana still attracted those who thought their birthright gave them the right to carry out heinous acts of violence against those who didn’t look or pray the way they did. Lynching and burning down houses of worship were their means of sending messages of “how it would be.” Jim Crow laws kept people of color separate, prevented them from voting and denied them equal treatment under the law.

Think about it: It took 100 years after the Civil War to finally pass laws that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin and prohibited racial segregation in schools, employment and public accommodations.

Now, for sure, there has been undeniable progress. We’ve seen people of color move into positions long denied them in business – including America’s first female self-made millionaire, Indiana’s own Madam C.J. Walker – in education, in sports, in the arts and in government, including the election and re-election of a Black President.

And yet today, in 2020, it’s clear, we must aspire to do more to “form that more perfect Union.”

The coronavirus has underscored stubborn racial disparities that are still with us, fueled by decades of unequal opportunity and structural barriers like job discrimination and access to good educations and healthcare. People of color are dying of COVID-19 at twice the rate of whites and are more likely to have lost their jobs during this pandemic.

And it’s in this environment that we’ve seen a number of unarmed Black men and women killed, culminating in an officer kneeling on the neck of Mr. George Floyd for 8 minutes and 46 seconds until his last breath was snuffed out.

I admit, I can’t put myself in a Black person’s shoes, can’t fully appreciate the everyday indignities and slights our friends and associates have had to deal with, let alone the fear of some things I’ve never had to think about. So, I’ve spent considerable time since Mr. Floyd’s death connecting with and listening to Black

leaders and stakeholders, one conversation leading to the next, and the next and the next.

I have talked with and listened to Mom & Pop business owners, college presidents, law enforcement, corporate executives, church leaders and everyday citizens – rural, urban and suburban. Many have shared what’s on their hearts and minds, and I’ve tried to do the same.

One theme I heard over and over again was the importance of getting to the root causes of inequities and not just reacting to the symptoms.

Several people conveyed the sense that, over our country’s long history, inequity and exclusion have actually been engrained in many of our institutions, systems and structures – often unknowingly. And while we’ve made progress, we haven’t rooted it out fast enough. Gaps persist, and some are widening.

Another thing I heard is to think about “the big picture.”

Dr. Sean Huddleston – the president of Martin University, Indiana’s only predominantly Black institution – said to me that while Black lives matter, Black livelihoods matter, too. I agree, on both accounts. Black lives matter and so do Black livelihoods. Dr. Huddleston said we must remove barriers to success so all can benefit and achieve their dreams without having to worry about how much privilege society has afforded them.

Another theme I heard is best captured by what Martin Luther King called “the fierce urgency of NOW” – that we need to use this moment as an opportunity to forge a new, more inclusive future. We cannot lose this opportunity to act constructively.

Dennis Bland, the president of “The Center for Leadership Development,” told me, “Change is going to happen. The key is to shape change.”

That’s what I and my team intend to do: Shape change.

Two months ago, I began work to make sure our own house was in order and address disparities and inequities in your state government. I called my entire cabinet together and shared my commitment to acknowledge past shortcomings and do something about it no matter how hard, raw or uncomfortable it might be. We formed an Executive Branch Task Force and charged them with identifying gaps in state government and providing recommendations to address them.

And for my first action, I am creating a new position: Indiana's first-ever Chief Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity Officer.

This person will be a member of the Governor's Cabinet – reporting directly to me – and will immediately:

- focus solely on improving equity, inclusion and opportunity across all state government operations as well as drive systemic change to remove hurdles in the government workplace and services we provide,
- and, second, help them develop their own strategic plans to tactically remove all such barriers.

In short, this new Cabinet member will help every state agency raise their game.

I'm confident this is the right first step because it's similar to how we're tackling infant mortality.

Indiana's infant mortality rate – which disproportionately affects many Black mothers and children – was unacceptable. So we set a goal: To become the best state in the Midwest for infant mortality by 2024. We appointed an expert to lead the effort – in this case, our Health Commissioner, Dr. Kris Box. We put in place the OB Navigator Program to help expecting mothers get the care they need and ensure that high-risk babies are delivered at hospitals with the right facilities. As a result, Indiana's infant mortality rate is at its lowest since 2012. But there's more to be done.

To truly empower marginalized Hoosiers, we must aggressively close education and workforce training gaps.

I believe that the surest path to equal opportunity in life is with a high-quality education. Unfortunately, our gaps in educational achievement and attainment reveal a more rocky path to success for Black students compared to their other peers. Black students have lower high school graduation rates, lower college enrollment and, as a result, attain fewer college credentials than their counterparts from other groups – even while Indiana ranks in the Top 3 nationwide for scholarship and tuition assistance, including help for minorities.

Indiana's new Secretary of Education, come January, must make it a priority to improve minority teacher recruitment and learning gaps to bridge the divide between the Have's and the Have Not's. I was reminded by a conversation with IPS Superintendent Dr. Aleesia Johnson of the value of education and skills training for all students – including after high school – in today's society and new-collar economy.

No task will go farther toward promoting equal economic opportunity throughout Indiana than a good education. That's why I've made developing our workforce a top priority. It's a passion. And that's why the State of Indiana will pay 100 percent to skill up Hoosiers to fill the current 118,000 job openings we have right now in Indiana.

Our "Next Level Jobs Program" – which helps Hoosiers get training and helps employers train them – has been, by most measures, an overwhelming success; just ask all those whose lives have already been changed for the better by the program. That's why we just added another \$50 million from the CARES Act to these high-wage, high-demand programs.

However, we must recruit more minorities into these fields and assist more minority-owned businesses to take advantage of our state programs. It's there waiting to be used. I've asked Indiana's Commissioner of Higher Education, Teresa Lubbers, to work with DWD Director Fred Payne and our Workforce Cabinet to submit specific recommendations on how we might adjust policies for all our workforce programs in order to create greater opportunity for people of color.

Truly leveling the playing field will require all of us, from every corner of society. That's why I am appealing to our private sector to continue to play the outsized role they play in our state.

Indiana is blessed with so many great companies and philanthropies with strong ties to our communities and commitments to diversity and inclusion. We've seen generous commitments to strengthening equity and inclusion in our state from companies like Anthem, Lilly, IKEA, Duke, CenterPoint Energy, the IMS, the Colts and Pacers; foundations like Lumina, the Lilly Endowment and Cummins Foundation; and many more. We're counting on all of you to continue your creative leadership and partnership to make life better for all Hoosiers, and asking others to step up and join in this noble cause.

Now, let me turn to policing.

I know that mayors and police chiefs around the state are taking a hard look at their use of force policies. We're doing the same. The first priority – for them as well as for me – is the protection of our citizens *and* our officers.

When you call 9-1-1, you expect a response, and we need to make sure they are trained and equipped to do so. For that reason, I will mandate the use of body cameras for every front-line state trooper by spring of 2021.

Indianapolis, Jeffersonville and Bartholomew County are just some of the local jurisdictions that have recently approved use of body cameras for their officers.

We are also taking a hard look at police training. The Indiana Law Enforcement Academy – or ILEA – provides the basic training for the majority of all law enforcement officers in the state, including our Indiana State Police. Last year alone, over 2,600 state law enforcement officers received some form of training at the academy.

I will direct a 3rd-party, top-down review of our state police and law enforcement academy curriculum and training. This can confirm good practices but also help us modernize how we train our officers. We'll look at areas like use of force, de-escalation training and implicit bias training. And, I'm committed to working with our legislature to add more civilian representation to the ILEA Board.

We also know that community policing is stronger when officers reflect the makeup of their community. While African Americans make up 9.8 percent of our state population, they comprise just 5.8 percent of our state police officers. So we have more work to do.

That said, I'm proud of the progress we made with our state police graduating classes. We've doubled the minority representation among graduates between 2016 and 2019 – from about 14 percent to nearly 28 percent. So I know this can be done.

And I'll continue working with members of the legislature, judiciary and with local sheriffs and prosecutors on ideas that can be brought forward next session through our annual legislative process to collaborate on sentencing reform, jail overcrowding and exorbitant fees.

Now, to better monitor our overall progress, I am directing the State of Indiana's Management Performance Hub to create a Public Disparity Data Portal to show how our state programs are working. We'll track and share up-to-date information on various fronts, each important to transforming someone's station in life at every stage, like:

- Pre-K enrollment
- Graduation, college enrollment and employment rates
- Access to capital
- Healthy Indiana Plan enrollment and other health indicators like substance abuse resources, and smoking, diabetes and hypertension rates
- Foster care placement rates
- Incarceration and recidivism rates... just to name a few areas we need to see improvement.

We'll put our cards on the table, face up. This type of public dashboard transparency is critical if we're all going to move forward together toward equity

and greater opportunity. You'll hear me talking more about what we're doing, what progress we're making and what gaps remain as we measure and publish the results.

Fellow Hoosiers,

Martin Luther King said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

I believe that.

When we see injustice, we must deal with it, whether it be against a people or a person – like when it came to pardoning an innocent man, Mr. Keith Cooper – finally, now free.

What I've laid out today are steps in a broad effort to make sure Indiana is a place where every Hoosier has an equal opportunity and access to achieve our founders' vision of "Life, Liberty, and that pursuit of Happiness."

Achieving that vision requires we address root causes, inequities and remove barriers that have built up for centuries. It won't be easy and it won't happen overnight, but oftentimes the best view comes after the hardest climb. Our climb requires change not just in policy but also in our hearts and minds.

In my conversation with Dr. Huddleston, he said, "No change happens without discomfort." I expect some discomfort in the months and years ahead – but – it's oh so worth it.

I ask all Hoosiers to join me in a spirit of openness, thoughtfulness and progress. That may mean questioning assumptions. It has for me. And it fueled a hunger to do more about it.

So, to those who feel impatient and that we're not moving fast enough on this journey, I get it. Protesting is a cherished right that Americans have fought and died for. To those who subscribe to the late John Lewis's, "Getting into some good trouble," I get it. But John Lewis also knew the key to driving change was nonviolence.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 reminds us to "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else." So, I say, if you want change, don't throw a brick; use a brick to lay a foundation for something better.

Every community deserves to be a peaceful place to play, go to school, work, shop and raise a family.

I feel for the shop owners – many of them people of color – whose stores were damaged by looters. And, we must never forget those who paid the full measure to keep us safe, as we still mourn Officer Breann Leath, Trooper Bo Stephan and Deputy Jacob Pickett – all killed in the line of duty while protecting others – of all colors. Those three left home every day in uniform, like so many others, not knowing if they’d ever return, serving in neighborhoods they only sought to keep safe and secure.

Fortunately, few of us are called upon to make that kind of sacrifice. But we all have a role to play.

For my part, I commit to you that I will work to be a “Barrier Buster” ... and to bring greater equity and opportunity within your state government and the services you entrust us to provide so that every Hoosier can take full advantage of their gifts and potential, and together, we’ll make *e Pluribus Unum* – “out of many, one” – not just a slogan in Indiana, but our North Star.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless our efforts and our great state.

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