Moving Beyond the Normality of Racism in the United States of America
A response to the Murder of Mr. George Floyd
From the
South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development (SCACED)

The South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development (SCACED) is grieved and dismayed by the murder of Mr. George Floyd by the four former police officers of the Minneapolis, Minnesota Police Department and condemn these actions. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, SCACED began a series of OpEds highlighting the Crisis for People of Color that COVID-19 is creating. We have been highlighting the disproportionate number of deaths by COVID-19 that people of color are experiencing.

In South Carolina, African Americans represent 52% of the COVID-19 deaths. And SCACED has been making the case that this high death rate is due to racial disparities in the “social determinants of health.” On top of the high death rate, people of color have also been disproportionately affected by the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19. Because of the disruptions of the virus on the daily lives of Americans, many voices have cried out, “When will things return to normal.” So, I think it is proper to ask the question, “what is normal?” According to Google, the definition of normal is, “the usual, average, or typical state or condition.” As an organization created to raise the quality of life for marginalized and low-wealth communities, we pose the question, “What is the state of normal for us in the US?” We at SCACED would submit the following observations.

With the preponderance of recent events, namely the high death rate of African Americans from COVID-19 (in SC 52% are African American), the murder of Ahmaud Arbery (February 23, 2020), Breonna Taylor (March 13, 2020), and George Floyd (May 25, 2020), and when applying Google’s definition, “the usual, average, or typical state or condition,” then the state of “Normality” in our nation is the systematic death of African Americans. These events have been a part of this country’s normal character for over 400 years because it is “the usual, average, or typical state or condition” and the lack of systemic changes to prevent them from happening again.

The recent killings of Ahumud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd follow a long line of murders that bear the same pattern, African Americans who were participating in innocent or relatively benign activities and were met with unwarranted force and death. African Americans like Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Terrence Crutcher, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Samuel DuBose, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Tamire Rice, LaQuan McDonald, Sandra Bland, and for us in South Carolina Walter Scott and the Mother Emanuel Nine; The Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Cynthia Graham-Hurd, The Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Tywanza Sanders, Ethel Lance, Susie Jackson, Depayne Middleton Doctor, The Rev. Daniel Simmons, and Myra Thompson. Their names deserve to be listed individually because each one was an American citizen and a human being. This is the reality of NORMAL in the United States of America…a place where one should find find Liberty and Justice for All. We have been here so many times before, and change has yet to come, because for African Americans this is NORMAL!

A famous quote of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who himself was an African American murdered by a white man who targeted him to silence the non-violent Civil Rights Movement, stated, “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce
urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there “is” such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.” For today’s context, this is no time for Normalcy.

Today, when we consider what is normal, we find African Americans with one tenth (.10) the wealth of our white neighbors. When we consider normal, African American boys are on the trajectory to being a permanent underclass in the United States. When we consider normal, we find South Carolina ranked 46th in the nation when it comes to Racial Disparities and 50th in measures of prosperity.

SCACED challenges everyone to envision and commit all of our resources to actions that will create a New Normal…and do it NOW! So, the Board of Directors and staff of the SCACED encourages everyone to:

• Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Real systemic change has only occurred when this nation was pushed beyond our comfort zones, regular practices and normal places. We must embark upon a life-long journey to experience the wonders of discomfort and grow from there.

• Conduct an examination of the presence of equity in our individual circles of influence and be proactive in ensuring equity exists for the most marginalized in our community. Equity is not equality, for equity recognizes that some people started at a disadvantage and require an extra hand to be prosperous.

• Find ways to build communities of color to be as prosperous as white communities. This will require public policies, additional financial resources, and a place at the table for people of color to help make decisions about our communities’ future.

• And most importantly, Organize, Mobilize, and VOTE, VOTE, VOTE for Change!!!

This is not an exhaustive list, but the first steps to creating a New Normal.

Pushing for Progress,

Don Oglesby, Chairman of the Board

Rev. Bernie Mazyck, President & CEO